

THE BRIGHT SANDS

The village of Chatham, on Nantucket Sound, has a splendid sea-faring history and a reputation for producing extraordinary men. Now it is diminished, living chiefly on its summer visitors, but its men are as remarkable as ever. Mr Taylor tells the story of a matrimonial tangle involving a couple of visitors, and how it was sorted out by the intervention of Captain Ezra Cobb and Uncle Veenie, two benevolent shore pirates whose exploits belong to the great comic tradition of Mr Micawber and Tristram Shandy's Uncle Toby.

Robert Lewis Taylor

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□ □ □ □ □ In the early morning a smoky sou'wester had hid the sun and the sea but now the day was fine, a good day for drying. On the beach below Chatham Light, down the bluff and near a gray shingled shack, an old man in oilskins stood tending a black iron pot that bubbled sluggishly over a driftwood fire. The cheerful stink of rotting flatfish gave flavor to his enterprise, reminding him that pleasanter duties lay just around the corner. He meant to go clamming when the tide turned—both he and the cats were needful of a chowder. Stirring briskly for a moment, he broke off to greet a sunburned man in his thirties and a splendid, filthy girl of fifteen. "Well, Samuel," she said, hailing him and sitting down on an upturned, half-caulked dory, "what a day you've got for it."

"Ezra Cobb's back," replied the old man. "Calls himself Captain now. He's up at Uncle Veenie's shack, spinning his talk about Florida."

"We heard. We hoped to arrange an interview."

"Ezra went steamboating once; it was just shortly before the Nancy B. Olsen broke up on the Handkerchief Shoals. So far as I recollect, it was the only work he's put his hand to in seventy-one years."

"The Captain is highly systematized," said the sunburned man.

"Ezra went quartermaster, he was first officer—on a run to Baltimore and down to Nova Scotia. We hadn't been out only a few hours before he stole a pair of my drawers."

The girl slid from the side of the dory and unrolled her cut-down khaki shorts. "They're coming over," she said. "They want to inspect."

In the vanguard of the group approaching the pot, carrying himself with public majesty, like MacArthur stepping ashore at Leyte,

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was a slight, graceful, barefooted figure wearing a white yachting cap and a pair of violently dark glasses, a man from whose near-albino face the vacation suns had stripped repeated weals of cracked and reddened skin.

• "Billy, my boy!" he suddenly cried, mysteriously effecting recognition of the pair through the dismal fenses. "And Joaniel!" He caught her up with enthusiastic embrace, then drew off fairly rapidly. "My God, how you've filled out."

"Captain Cobb," said Bill, the sunburned man. "Of Florida."

"Yes, those poor fellows down there, ignorant in the ways of the sea, have looked to Cape Cod for leadership. I guide and instruct and collect little sums in an effort to maintain a decent stand——"

"Tell them about Florida, Ezra," said Uncle Veenie.

"Miami enjoyed a prosperous winter season," said Captain Cobb. "Hotel bookings——"

"Tell them about the deck chair," said Uncle Veenie.

"The idea was suggested to me by an elderly widow," said Captain Cobb, "the same as you've heard me speak of from time to time——"

"The one that lets you sleep on her porch?"

• Thanks to the widow, whom Captain Cobb described as having, "thrown herself on my protection," he had prospered during the Southern winter. At a modest outlay of a dollar and a half for a deck chair, and a few pennies more for a placard, he had become comfortably launched in a lucrative enterprise, the only one of its kind in Miami. "Sign on for Student Cruise," his advice went. "Learn Navigation, Rigging, Etc., Commodious Schooner, Ten Days, Ten Dollars—Captain H. Cobb, Prop."

The great trick was, Captain Cobb said, selecting a ship which had an intrinsic appeal for all ages. It would have been useless, for example, to pick out anything dark or dingy; the ladies would automatically have been excluded. Similarly, a spit-and-polish craft might prove distasteful to the rougher male element. It was a matter of appraisal and rejection, fortunately with a wide expanse of harbor in which to roam.

"How exactly did you work it? Tell it again," said Uncle Veenie.

"Seems as if you waste an uncommonly fretful amount of time coming to the point."

"First time out, I set up the chair and the sign on a wharf beside an able-appearing boat and took in fourteen dollars in less than an hour and a half. Advance collections. A dollar, two dollars, and like that. The cruise was scheduled for Tuesday. On Tuesday I was over in another part of town, alongside a gaff-rigged yawl. Naturally, I had to keep changing the sign."

"Many complaints?"

"I was chased some."

Toward the end of the explanation, which he had heard several times before, Uncle Veenie leaned over and sniffed at the black iron pot, his long, bland, guileless face beaming with constitutional benevolence. "I believe you've got the worst out, Samuel," he said. "I believe it's gone a little mite faster this year."

"A fellow I dug some razor fish for—I believe he's a judge up to Newton Center—gave me this box, said it would hasten the roughest wash. With a deterging action, or so he claimed."

"I've seen the ads on television, Samuel," said Bill. "It sounds like a winner. No rinsing, no unpleasant aftertaste—made like a doctor's prescription, plus chloroform."

"Chlorophyll," said the girl. "Anyhow, that's aspirin. Or bubble gum. It comes right after Howdy Doody. Tell me, Samuel," she went on, "why do you always pick the first of June to do your laundry? I've wondered."

"June one has been good to me. I've had good luck with the first of June. I've tried her in April, and I've tried her in May, but the result isn't pleasing. Somehow the pieces fail to go through the year. They don't remain crisp."

"Now, Samuel," said Uncle Veenie, nudging Captain Cobb, "are you sure you've got everything in? It wouldn't pay to overlook something. It's a blessed long haul till next June." •

Poking definitively at the swirling mass, the old man counted off, "Two blankets, two burlap curtains, one doily, two pair mohair trousers, three shirts, six socks, two full and complete sets of underwear. She's all there." And in a burst of domestic confidence, "The kitchen looks right nakid without the curtains, don't it?"

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His house lay back from the water, a triumph of angles and patches. The sea and the beaches had provided it all. Each new tide that flowed and ebbed left a scrap of treasure somewhere within reach, among the bays and inlets and sounds that led out to the ocean. The structure had grown slowly over the years, though leaping with little spurts in notation of the havoc wrought by the terrible Chatham bars. The frosted balustrade had fenced in an ornate quarterdeck, whose planks, together with the master that trod them, had long ago suffered the sea change. His timbers were English oak, the porch was teak, and the mahogany steps, or gangway, leading up from the sand and the eelgrass were by tradition "off one of the Astors' yachts." Precision was unimportant in these cases; an old and respected keeper of the beaches, native to the village, had established that his steps came off an Astor yacht. It was so entered in the lore.

Periodically exception was taken to Samuel's garnishment from the aimless lumberyards of the ocean. In the pale bank of architecture above, where dwelt the nervous and the powerful, opinions had been voiced that the house was a municipal eyesore. A petition had even been circulated briefly, by a dyspeptic summer resident whose retirement was devoted to the neurotic decimation of striped bass. The value of his real estate was threatened, he said, and he sought to fix ownership straightaway down to the high-tide mark. But the project died of malnutrition. There is a local superstition, religious in feeling, against any undue tampering with the beach. When word was circulated that he later hoped to subdivide the ocean, his petition passed from view.

The beginning of summer; Uncle Veenie had nailed the peppermint awning to the sea side of his fishing shack. In the southeast breeze it fluttered over the smooth plank bench affixed to the baseboard, and his weather vane (a red whale above) had been fastened as always in the west, the quarter of fairest weather. In the renting of skiffs and dories, Uncle Veenie had found, it was a help to point with experience to the likelihood of a blue-weather day. Shading his candid, kindly eyes for a sweep of the horizon and a quick look at the whale, he gave out his cordial, erroneous forecasts, to the schoolteachers from Lawrence, the Boston postal clerks, the shop-

owners, students, and others—the fraternal miscellany that strolled the beach in compliance with the universal need to return to salt water.

“Yes, we get our best days on a west wind. It’s going to be a little dandy today.” The related facts of a black ball on the horizon, calf-like hoots from the Pollock Rip Lightship, and, on the slope above, a Coast Guard indicator lying squarely in the east, bothered him not at all. At Uncle Veenie’s shack the weather was forever fine. It was manufactured to order, to match his disposition.

“I look for an uncommon degree of business this summer,” he told Captain Cobb, as he led the way back up the beach, past an aromatic well of lobster bait, over anchors wanting stocks or flukes, and around the decayed, half-buried ribs of a centerboard sailboat. This last was the one from which Captain Joshua Mayo had drowned, after seventy years of fighting hurricanes across half the watery surface of the globe. Stopping alongshore for a peaceful old age, he painted up a secondhand knockabout, sailed out into the Bay, and, catching a puff, tumbled overboard and so was lost. It was not remarked as curious that he had never learned to swim.

“The town of Chat-ham is dead, expired, passed on, embalmed and buried,” replied Captain Cobb. “There’s an absence of business here and always will be. No town,” he said with emphasis, “can hope or expect to achieve progress without a normal capacity for sin. Look at them up there”—waving contemptuously in the general direction of the settlement—“you might as well open up the jail and throw away the key.”

“How do you stand it through the summer, Ezra?” asked the girl.

“I have the promise of two ladies to go floundering in the morning. When they secure the boat with two dollars, I mean to visit the dog track at Taunton.”

The two boats in the Captain’s custody—slender, tippy dories—were the property of a trusting cousin immobilized by arthritis. The income to the owner was generally meager. Indeed he had complained to his part-time housekeeper that the heyday of Chatham the tourist center seemed to be past. “The boats don’t

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appear to rent out as before," he said, and his agent on the beach concurred. "The fault," said Captain Cobb, "lies in the nature of the people. The spirit's gone out of them. Used to be, thieves in Chat-ham were as thick as fiddlers in hell. Now they're so afraid somebody will skin them they retreat behind their doors at eight o'clock and turn off all the lights. There aren't any saloons and there aren't any horse tracks. The atmosphere is unwholesome. The place doesn't draw."

The income to Captain Cobb from the dories was moderately substantial. As a rule, he got at least one of the boats out every day. Moreover he advertised himself as a prime authority on fishing. His parties were largely women, who seldom made more than the one trip. The ripe extravagance of their guide's language, and the macabre flavor of his anecdotes, diverted their attention from the sport. On his outing of two days previous, with a lady lawyer from Brockton, and her friend, he had revitalized a narrative he picked up in his youth, in the old Andrew Harding store, where the seamen gathered. "We were becalmed in the Tortugas and it didn't rain for forty-three days," he told them. "It was the driest weather ever noted by Chat-ham men. When we tried to drop anchor, it floated off astern. One of the passengers died and the captain instructed me to lay him out in the ice room, alongside the salt beef and pork. I wish you ladies to believe it was the liveliest time I ever had with a corpse. The man was tolerably fat and difficult to hoist and he had false teeth and affected a toupee to conceal his premature balditude. But in the dry weather, you see, his head shrunk down and his teeth fell out and his wig kept slipping off. I'm a squeamish man myself; I asked to be relieved from the assignment. But we had Captain Eliphamet show that voyage—the easiest fellow to irritate that ever originated from down here on the Cape. Anything could distract him. He yelled, 'I want that man trussed up in Christian style—I aim to deliver him intact!' So I went back to the ice room and took needle and thread and stitched up his mouth, capturing the teeth, and then I found a hammer and nails and fastened down his wig. It was as pretty a job as I've ever seen, and so said the undertaker afterward when I helped him draw the nails. Mind you, I was only doing my duty, but it's the small,

friendly services a man performs without thanks that are the best satisfaction to him in later life."

In the autumn, when the high-course tides came, Uncle Veenie's shack was toppled by storm winds and went bouncing and sliding up the beach. A hundred-pound mushroom anchor slowed its progress and eventually stopped it, usually tilted dizzily against a concave, washed-away hummock. Then, toward the end of April, before the spring flounder took up settlement in the Bay, he and his neighbors floated it down on the first big flood, set it up, and started the work of repairs. There was no short cut. Though active, science had failed to date to come forward with a suitable harness for the sea. Uncle Veenie's signs, in bright blue lettering, after the artistic preference of the region, announced his unthrustful enterprise: "Row Boats to Let"; "Motors"; "Oil Paintings." His offers of entertainment were modest by comparison with Cobb's, some two hundred yards down the line. On the back of a handsome bench he had lifted from a park in Eastham, the Captain advertised, "Passage to Outer Beach \$1; last word on Fishing; Side Trips Holland and Brazil \$1.50."

Up Doane's Lane, at the corner of the bluff road, he had another herald, equally restrained: "Nautical & Beach Hd'qrs.—E. Cobb, Cap't. (Down below—Past Sign Marked Private.)"

"That's the last of them," said Uncle Veenie when they sat down at his shack. He pointed to a partially scraped hull on the sand and then to a fleet of gray skiffs and dories, eleven all told, that fish-tailed slowly at anchor on the last of the incoming tide. "I would have been in the water earlier only I had to put three pine plugs in the old Rocking Horse. Comes of employing borrowed nails—they ~~eat~~ out."

"Now here we are," said Captain Cobb, "the starting off, as you would say, of a fresh summer, and if I know Chat-ham we won't have two dollars more to rub together at the end than we have right now. First off, there'll be a three-day northeaster, and then there'll be a cold wave, and then a hot wave, and after that those fellows heaving and hauling down in Washington will goose up the taxes again, and everybody'll return home and stay there. Speaking, in a business sense, I'm discouraged. I hesitate to risk any more

capital in the North. The season's too short."

"Why, Ezra," said Uncle Veenie mildly, "you're not overextended here, not that meets the eye anyway. If you scratch off flounder hooks, I can't recognize that you have any overhead at all. To speak of, that is."

"Let's imagine we were walking Nauset Beach, or the inside of Morris Island," suggested the girl, "and all of a sudden we came across something in the sand. Black, just a corner sticking out——"

"Shaped like a chest, you mean."

"Of beautiful ironwood—they're nearly always ironwood in the books—and bound all around in brass."

"Too heavy to carry, according to most authorities," said Bill. "What you do is get sacks."

"Absolutely. It's all we can do to dig it out."

"How about the locks?"

"Well, hardly. Uncle Veenie has to hurry back for a drill."

"And inside?"

"Not pignuts, like in Treasure Island, but big yellow coins, and watches, and brooches, and rubies and emeralds and diamonds, everything shining and twinkling, like in 'The Gold-Bug'——"

"Or a fortune apiece," said Bill. "What would you do first, Uncle Veenie?"

"I think I should favor an early retirement. It would be a pleasure to me to get out of these waders. Sixty-eight years I've been coming down to this beach, first as a knee-britches boy scampering out of sight of the mill, and such heavy work, and now set up on my own in a professional way. I'd like to put it behind me."

"What would you buy?" asked the girl.

"There are a number of things I've been meaning to acquire in the past few seasons but have never got around to it. An inboard cruiser would be a convenience for Sundays, with a little toilet forward. I don't mind owning up that I'm about wore out using a pee can. Further than that, I'd like to do something for my dog."

"I've noticed he's missing. What's the matter with him?"

"The lower part side of his jaw is partly stove in, the result of seeking a scallop under a boat they were launching down to Dunbar's."

"What about you, Ezra?" said Bill.

"If you come to Hyannis you'll see me leaving for Florida in my own private car," said Captain Cobb. "For a man of my years and position, begging rides on gasoline trucks is a poor answer in transportation. It's too democratic. The rest of my fortune can be put in the old-fashioned two-dollar bills, so as to be handier at the track."

"You know," said the girl, "we ought to slice Good Samuel in, we really ought. After all these years talking about his 'ranges.'"

"The odd thing is, I think he actually does have ranges on a chest," said Bill. "I was looking it up in the town library. A British pay ship, with money for the Hessians, was lost just offshore here on March 3, 1775. Supposed to be carrying better than five million dollars in gold. And Samuel's no liar. He's vague and rambling, but he doesn't invent things."

"That selfsame chest has been sighted twice else to my certain knowledge," said Captain Cobb. "Once beyond the outer beach and once in the cut-through. Both times the weather worsened before a grapple could be brought into play."

Uncle Veenie glanced up, with the sailor's uncanny warning of disaster. A small boy dragging a shark's head on a string was approaching over the sand, his bare feet making a rubbery, shuffling sound. When he reached the shack, he gave two or three violent tugs and went through motions of cranking an invisible reel.

"Morning, Hank," quavered Uncle Veenie. "Good morning, son."

"You better lock up," said the boy. "Your wife said if you didn't have any motors out you was to come home and paint the rose arbor. She gave me a penny."

With the agility of a youth in his twenties, Uncle Veenie sprang toward the cluster of uniform rowboats. "You haven't seen me, Hankie," he cried over his shoulder. "You heard I was off exploring a new bed of steamers. Just help yourself to one of those hand-lines in there, son. And don't forget to snap the padlock when you leave. Goodby, folkses."

From the beach Bill and Joan rode home on the rim of the town,

looking over the long green Bay and the white strip of Nauset beyond—the Wonder Strands of the Icelandic sagas, which the Norsemen frequented six hundred years before Columbus pointed his craft toward the probable Pillars of Hercules. It was high noon, a clear day. At such times the iron sides of the lightship at the Pollock Rip were a discernible red, and the Stonehorse was a dot on the far right horizon. The two came and went, according to the conditions that prevailed. On the sharp days they seemed part of the town, but in the haze and the murk and the fog, in winter and rough weather, they were the property of the sea.

Stopping the convertible, he took a pair of glasses from the glove compartment and studied the nearest ship.

"They're too close today," said the girl. "It's like windowpeeping. Are they doing anything secret and exciting?"

"I see a boy fishing, and another's hanging laundry in the rigging. My word, they look bored."

"I was talking to one of them the other day. He had a big gash over his eye and said the ship took a lurch. His head hit a knife hanging up in the galley."

"Where was the talk going on?"

"At the bus stop. They're fine about talking to me. This fellow said they missed girls out on the ship. He invited me out, especially at night."

"Well, this was a talk."

"Bill," said the girl, "I'm very keen about Uncle Veenie getting a Sunday cruiser, with a little toilet forward. And oughtn't Captain Cobb to have more leisure for the track?"

"Both."

"Let's do all our things to make money with them, clamming and fish-selling and scavenging, and so on. Only harder this time."

"I was about to suggest it."

"Theme of the summer."

"Whenever possible."

"They don't mind our not being poor. They're grand like that."

"There isn't a snob among them," he replied. "And now for home and high life and baby."

"Yes, Bill," she said with mock enthusiasm.

2 Theirs was a double house, like many built here in that period. That is, it was a home for two families, probably kin, who found it convenient to live together while their masters voyaged. The stairways to the bedrooms in the attics were narrow and steep, with white rope handrails, and there was a widow's walk, to watch ships off. The land on which it sat was high and covered with worthless grass that flowered faintly in the spring and dried up early, seldom needing cutting. A weedy point, raised up a few dozen yards above the sand and pebble beach, it thrust out into the Bay and the northeast storms, sandier than it might have been because the ocean once broke through in this place. All around the house and the garage and the arbors and the windmill bloomed roses in wild splendor, in seeming apology for the grass, while thick on the slopes going down were late-bearing beach plums, much prized for jellies and tarts.

The original white owner was a cleric, a saintly, indefatigable man, who toiled away at selling his God to the fishing and unresponsive Indians. He lent his name to the point; and the lane that wound in through the pines, called Minister's Prim, was the work of his two hands alone. He had bought the land (for twenty dollars) because of its reputation; it was the first observed by the pilgrims as, making their way toward New Jersey, they were stopped by the shoals of the Pollock Rip and turned back to the rock that became Plymouth.

"I notice we have a new rig," said the girl when they came out of the scrub and into the dusty drive that led down a curve to the house. He waved to his wife, a tall brunette, inexhaustibly lacquered and cared for. Her rich hair was twisted into a gleaming knot behind, the dull sheen of heavy yellow gold stood out oddly against the extreme pallor of her wrists and throat, and an au-

thetic bosom rose into careless view beneath a trivial halter. Around her mouth were parenthetical lines of annoyance; she looked fine-drawn.

"It's a kind of sunsuit, I believe," said the man, pumping the convertible to a stop. "They had them in a window at the Sail Loft."

"It's stunning. It allows an even, well-distributed tan."

"I wish you could stay home a little, Bill," said the brunette, walking over to the car. "Say just at the beginning of the season. Problems come up."

"What this morning?"

"Two things. One about an anchor in the seaweed around the house, and another is that we're being sued."

"Who by?"

"Quaint, crusty, kelp-haired Mr. Nicholby across the way. He says our putting that name-stone out on the corner was actionable. It leans over his property four inches. He's got it marked off on a stick."

"Couldn't you have had Walter drag it back? It looks simple enough to me—stone's out too far, haul it in."

"Well, I waited," she said. "It seemed a little cruel. I honestly think he'd rather sue. He hasn't had a damn thing to do all winter, and now we're here. Last summer it was clams."

"What was it about the anchor, Myra?" asked the girl.

Her sister studied her carefully. "Joanie, you promised you'd quit making mud pies. You can't deny it—both Walter and Alice heard you. You're too old for a play-pen. What do you think I'd better do?"

"We were digging sea worms to give to Uncle Veenie. I'm crazy about your new dress, Myra."

"Just skip in and have a wash, pet. Nice clean hands for lunch."

The interior was finished in dark blue-gray, an easy shade and a cautious covering for old walls beside the sea. The pictures were prints and paintings of clippers, barks, and brigantines, wallowing bravely in storms, and there was a row of venerable portraits, cracked and gloomy, of stern-faced pioneers who had been summoned from the lofts of antique merchants and appeared to resent

it deeply. On a cherrywood table near a window stood a gigantic goldfish tank through whose coral labyrinth the bored inhabitants propelled themselves with streaming orange tails. Beyond the window, the Bay and the strip and the sea glistened hotly in the strong noon sun.

Bill climbed up to his bedroom, a low and unpremeditated tunnel of chintz and fish-net curtains and worn rag rugs. The windows were open on both sides. Across the room blew a freshening breeze, snapping the curtains and touching the Chinese glasses that hung before a curtained travesty of a closet. He lay back on the bed and waited for his wife.

"All right to come in, Bill?" Her voice always had that inflection after she managed the gangway, he thought, implying a gallant endorsement of alien and distasteful carpentry. She lowered herself carefully into a rocker and lit a cigarette, pulling closer a stand with an ashtray.

"How are things?" he said without looking up.

"Funnily enough, I wasn't being picky about this morning," she replied. "On the contrary, I want you to go off and have some fun. You and Joan."

"How has it been with you so far?"

"I'm going to, Bill," she said. "I really am."

"Just rock along, and don't think about anything nasty. Maybe if you gave up commentators for a while."

There was a silence, broken only by the tinkling of musical glasses, before she said, "I see it like voting. It's an obligation, and besides, this is the year for excitement on the air waves."

"Of course," he said easily. "But excitement wasn't exactly what they ordered, was it, kid?"

"I tell you what, Bill. You could do your bit. How'd you like to be a big help in this crisis of domestic relations?"

"You name it."

"Well, I continue to fight the notion that you're stupidly easy-going." Her voice rose slightly, above the murmur of the chimes. "I could be wrong, but you seem a little superior to it all, and so utterly tolerant. It's what you complain about in Claudette Colbert."

"I'll try to tense up."

"And flippant. Always that same tone. Flippant——"

He rolled over on his side to look at her. "Why don't you decide to let it go? Your eye'll begin twitching in a minute."

"And I was wondering if you couldn't take those damn glasses down and stick them in the toilet. I keep wanting to go out and see if somebody's selling fish."

He sat up on the bed and said, "Lunchtime, Myra. Let's have a nice, soothing drink. Are we alone, or has the parade of freaks started?"

"Lila's coming over, with her boy."

"The idiot?"

"He's a normal boy, normally brash."

"He's an insufferable little pipsqueak, the typical product of batik abstractions instead of arithmetic."

"That's better, Bill."

• Like all Bostonians, he reflected, Lila had inherited her house on Cape Cod. Down from great-great-grandfather, great-grandfather and so on. They're smart about money. Massachusetts the trust-fund state. Arms: An executor couchant in a field of coupons. Device: Confine it to bonds and preferred. Extreme homage for the trust fund, social security of the unsubmerged. Children had them before they were born. Nobody ever sells anything. Well, some Cape Codder had to sell it in the beginning; no, the lawyers probably peddled it after he died. You rent or you buy from an out-of-stater. It'd be fine to buy this house, for example, but the old man will cling like death, and struggle along on less money. Say he got forty thousand and put it into telephone stock—he'd have a neat little income. As it is, he's got rent: twenty-two hundred. Out of that, taxes—not much because that's the way they do things; with an old house they seldom change the assessment. Taxes here about a hundred and ninety. Sell it and they may jump to four hundred, though an identical house across the street goes right along at one-ninety. Insurance, repairs, depreciation, and the rest. Net income about sixteen hundred. So by hanging on he's got eight hundred less and a fat lot of worries every year. Maybe they aren't so smart about money. Lila's not smart about money. She's

so stingy she only has a decent drink when she's in somebody else's uninherited house. Maybe that was why Jimmy left. Jimmy, the non-conforming auslander. What does Lila do for sex? Poor Lila.

"Hello, Lila."

They sat in deck chairs on the lawn and had sidecars, a transient enthusiasm of his wife's. Joan had a Coke. Chris, the boy, had orange juice from a cocktail glass, like Mother's. He was a bright-eyed, attentive child, wonderfully alive to each spoken word of the adults, each alteration of their expressions. As his mother hinted, with a helpless little laugh, his knowledge of everyday affairs was fantastic, almost frightening. She avoided the word "precocious." Despite all this, he made a genteel show of not intruding corrections, but kept things factual mostly by indirection, and usually with an apology.

"What's for lunch?" asked Bill.

"Alice has one of her chowders," said his wife. "And she has little boiled potatoes and Swiss chard and corn soufflé and spring flounder. Mostly good Cape Cod."

"Good Cape Cod chowder?"

"One of Alice's good chowders."

"With tomatoes, or Manhattan chowder. Alice carries this chauvinism too far. It isn't shameful to be from New York, but we ought to play it down around here. When on Cape Cod, eat Cape Cod chowder. It's better anyhow. Take out the tomatoes," he said with a confidential smile at Lila, "and put in the milk. And don't forget onions."

Chris shifted his position slightly. "Just one onion, sir. And isn't a two-inch cube of pork recommended? I happened to be reading the Boy Ranger manual this morning," he added. "I don't read it very often."

"You can furnish the pork," said Bill. "And it's all right about the manual. Bring it up next time and read it through lunch."

"I'm crazy about flounder," said Lila. "I love the business of their only having one eye."

"Mr. Nickerson mentioned that down at the fish pier last evening," said the boy. "Flounders are born with two eyes, like other

fish, but they're on the bottom so much that the lower eye shifts over to the other side."

"You shouldn't go around talking that way against flounders. You probably made it up."

"Bill, the fish's friend," said his wife.

At lunch, Lila, flushed with drink and maternity, spoon-fed the prodigy lead-ins that established his superiority to the conversation. Among the statistics that he presented with quiet insistence appeared the fact that the lines on Mars were not canals, as submitted by Bill in connection with flying saucers, but were believed by science to have some prosaic meteorological meaning. Also that mosquitoes, far from being absent in the Arctic, were possibly more pestiferous in that region than anywhere else on earth; that vegetables were inessential to the human diet; that the first motorcar was built in Great Britain rather than the United States; that the American Indians, instead of being impervious to weather, were remarkably thin-skinned and spent nearly all of the winter months sitting in their wigwams and coughing; and, finally, to bring matters closer home (and embodying a pretty sharp rebuke to his host), that anybody who called a quahaug a clam was conceivably defective mentally.

"I've started letting Chris watch television," said Lila. "For a while, Dr. Rader considered it out of the question. He thought it confused his dream symbols."

"You're having Chris psychoanalyzed?" asked Joan. "At his age?"

"Goodness no. We're only verifying his adjustment. He goes once a week."

"I like television," the boy stated. "I've been introduced to Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers and Gene Autry."

He sounded as if he had made the discovery singlehanded, like Marconi announcing the wireless.

"Along that line," Bill said, "you might be interested to know that I'm fairly well acquainted with Cassidy. We were together in the war."

"Oh, indeed? What's he like?"

"Yellow. We had a merry hell of a time with him during the Bulge."

"What did he do?" asked Chris uncertainly.

"Colonel caught him trying to sneak across the lines twice, and he was mixed up in the black market."

The boy eyed him coldly. "Then why didn't they put him in jail?"

"Mrs. Roosevelt hushed it up. Seems they're third cousins, or something like that. Her great-grandmother was a Cassidy."

His wife had put down her knife and fork. She sat back to watch him with concentrated interest. She said, "Did you know Roy Rogers, too?"

His expression was deprecatory. "I can't really say that I knew him. I had only that one encounter with him—in the Lexington Avenue subway."

"Which encounter was that?" asked the boy.

"Rogers had knocked an old crippled colored woman down and was kicking her in the groin. Trying to snatch her purse, I imagine. When he saw me coming, he jumped up and legged it. We never met again."

Eila leaned forward and patted her son on the arm. "Well, Chris," she said in a hearty tone, "in view of these fascinating revelations, perhaps we'd better stick to Gene Autry. Unless," she continued, looking at Bill, "you have some kind of slanderous file on him, too."

He nodded reassuringly. "Autry's clean as a whistle, as far as I know. I never heard a word against him the whole time we were in college. He opened a little hairdresser shop junior year, and before graduation he had almost all the better sorority business. The fellows kidded him a lot around the frat, but what the heck—a living's a living, the way I see it."

"You know," said the boy wonderingly, "I understand it now. These are all lies. Every one of them. How anybody could bring himself to talk that way, even in sport, about—"

"Never mind, Chris," said his mother.

"You were being pretty funny about Hopalong Cassidy and his chums," said Myra later in his room.

"Oh, it's just something I do."

"No, I mean it. It wasn't bad at all. A little broad, of course, and in poor taste, considering the boy's visits to the psychiatrist. There's also the fact that Lila will never bring him here again as long as she lives. Why do you do it, Bill? You always go too far and hurt somebody. You have a marvelous time, but the equation's balanced by somebody else being miserable."

"You?"

"Not me particularly—Chris."

"The boy's a statistician. I was only giving him a hand-up. You probably noticed some fairly serious gaps in his collection. He's strong on quahogs and mosquitoes, but in the matter of cowboys he hasn't even made a start. There's a striking resemblance to Sherlock Holmes, who, you recall——"

"I don't choose to recall."

"Choose to come here to the window a minute." With a show of negligence, she walked across the room, deferring to the custom of women with notable breasts of modestly smoothing and tightening her clothes in order to display herself to immodest advantage. "Have a look outside." Under the vertical sun, the water seemed alive with green and white moving things. The tide was ebbing against a fresh breeze, pushing up momentary windrows of ripples that winked and danced and dissolved everywhere over the surface. Beyond these explosions of light and motion lay the white strip of Nauset against the unfrivolous dark of the North Atlantic. "I like the look of that. I have a good feeling about it," he said. "It's the way we were in Kennebunkport before the migration began. And the other places. Now I'm going good here; it's fine. I like it ever so much. And what I like about it is what you can see through the window and the people that live here and some of the summer people and the heaven-sent balm of dodging the ones downtown that you've gathered around you in your distress. I like it. You know it. And so the trouble starts."

She sat down on the chest beside him. "Do you remember Quogue, Bill? I'm talking about the summer Joan broke her toe and you carried her piggyback to the doctor's?"

"Things were great up as far as the middle. I'm hazy about the

next step."

"There isn't any need to be. I've told you and the doctors told you, and all you see is that your wife has weak knees. Alone among the maladies, sick nerves attract no sympathy. I wish you could know what's it like when something presses in and you wonder if your next breath's coming."

"I've followed the learned talk on the subject of the breath and the elusive pressure. According to reports, there's no medical reason for it, either in English or in Latin. What happens before? Right before the pressure, that is?"

"I don't know. I've thought about it a lot. I only know that it goes away when the houses are shut up, and it's better when I see people who don't use words like 'learned talk' and 'elusive pressure.'"

"Fair enough. This is the summer of the big try all around. Maybe no more elusive pressure on either side."

"That's the way I've got it in my mind."

He helped her to her feet.

"Let's ride down the Bay. I'll bring the *Islander* in from the mooring, and you can troll for stripers. You used to like that."

"Just us?"

"I'll ask Joan."

She went in to change her dress.

Early the next morning he got up and put on a pair of faded blue swimming trunks and a blue polo shirt and crept downstairs and made a breakfast of cereal and doughnuts and milk. His wife was going to Truro to hear a harp concert. Shutting the kitchen door noiselessly behind him, he tiptoed down the path through the bayberry and beach-plum bushes and the silverleaf poplars to the cool sand of the shore. Under the morning mist he

could see his two boats, white and mahogany, one inboard and one outboard, pulling at their moorings. His dinghy was still out of water but not far out; he had set it nearly right the evening before, guessing at the hour he would be up and the probable reach of the tide. He got the oars out of the bushes and picked up the tiny Danforth anchor from the sand and put them in the boat; then he walked the dinghy down, bow and stern, guarding its bottom from the shingle, until it rode in the water.

He had grasped the gunwales to hop in when he heard his sister-in-law's voice: "Wait up, Bill." Coming down the path, she tried to dodge the leaves and their cold water from the heavy dew. She had on a last year's bathing suit, a poor thing of streaks and tatters, and carried an Army surplus fatigue jacket.

"You're supposed to be going to Truro to get the culture."

"Not this time," she replied. "It wasn't said specifically. Technically I'm beyond the grasp of the law. Anyhow, there's no law north of the Yukon."

"You haven't had breakfast."

"I'm breakfasting out. Uncle Veenie's opening little necks this morning. An invitation has been extended. Bill," she said, "do you suppose I ought to take a little rum with the clams? Everybody seems to."

"Another objection is," he said, "that I don't care for your costume."

"This is my own favorite bathing suit. Nobody in this world could make me give it up. What's wrong with it?"

"Not to spare your feelings," he said, "it's a little skimpy below the Mason-Dixon line."

"I was looking at it in the mirror. I said to myself, I'll just keep my legs together when I've got this number on, but I won't give it up because it does a good deal for me above."

"I was coming to that. You'll wear the jacket down at Uncle Veenie's."

"Let me row, Bill," she said.

"Hardly. You sit on the stern thwart and keep your attention on the suit." Reaching the outboard, he started the motor on the second pull and, casting off, turned it up to full speed. The boat

climbed out onto the step, skittering lightly over the insignificant waves, and leveled off at thirty-five miles an hour. In all his years of being around the water, he thought, he had never got over that first big gather-and-leap of a clean small-boat when a fast motor is opened up suddenly. It's better with the high-horsepower Chris-Crafts and their kin, even a thing of feeling a little ascendancy over the stubbornest of the elements, but the inboards can't go up on the beach and going up on the beaches is what's good about this place and boats.

Avoiding the lobster buoys, they sliced across the Bay toward the Old Harbor Coast Guard Station, long since abandoned because the outer beach had built up for miles down the line. He banked around the black-can channel marker, standing the boat on its starboard rib ends, and then headed away from the station toward the middle of the Bay. During the winter, the inner bar they had rounded had also made up, leaving only a hundred yards of waterway at low tide. But it was all white sand bottom, no rocks, raked continuously by the swift-running tide and nothing there to break or foul propellers.

The girl had taken a pair of glasses out of the forward compartment. Now she handed them back, pointing toward Tern Island. A yellow dory was bumping the beach at the far end. She formed the word "Ezra," and he nodded, putting the wheel hard over. The Captain was shortly visible; he appeared to be in a condition of some distress—barefooted, his white trousers rolled up, and running back and forth beside a small, closed-off inlet.

"He's got a gaff," said the girl as they slowed down. "He seems to be chasing something." Captain Cobb was hanging onto his yachting cap with one hand while in the other he brandished a cut-down shark hook, now and then prancing out into the water a few paces to lay about viciously.

"Hey there, Ezra!" called Bill. They landed and got out and started up the beach, putting to flight a cloud of quarrelsome gulls.

"There's an old granddaddy striper caught up here and I mean to get him," cried Captain Cobb. "Like as not I can sell it to the Bars Inn for a tidy profit."

"At forty-five cents a pound this time of year," observed the girl.

"We'll have to step lively," said Captain Cobb. "The tide's flowing and the water will drain in here within the half hour. Then my fish'll be over the bars and off to Halifax."

They split up, to close in from opposite ends. When Bill and the girl sloshed toward the Captain there was a wild swirl of water, the fish flashed off obliquely and, misjudging the depth in its panic, bellied down for a second in the sand. "Now!" yelled Bill, and the Captain whirled as nimbly as a youngster to chock home the gaff. He dragged up his catch, thrashing and straining, and sat down to rest.

"I think this is a very old fish," said the girl.

"That makes no difference about that," said Captain Cobb. "There isn't any law or statute says they have to announce a fish's age on the menu. I'll fillet this gentleman, if I can find a knife sharp enough, and they'll be equally as happy as if they had something good. Anyhow, there's a convention on up there, so the question of toughness don't enter. Those fellows aren't particular what they eat. Tell them it's sheep dog, if you prefer, or boiled Eskimo. By the time they arrive in the dining room from the bar, it's all one to them."

It was a giant of a bass, though a fading giant. The parallel bands of silver speckles were much cut up by scars, and a jagged, half-healed hole near one jaw told of some sudden deep-water encounter, one of the jungle mishaps that befall the listless and the weary. Nonetheless, it was a champion for size, and Captain Cobb complained of its weight as he dragged it into his dory.

"Billy, my boy, I'll strike you up for a tow. Bringing this fish to gaff has started up a rheumatic condition in the neighborhood of my slats. More than that, I've loitered so long ashore I've missed the tide."

Down the Bay, toward Uncle Veenie's shack, they rode in tandem, with Captain Cobb's bowline passed around a stern cleat of the outboard and the Captain seated in reflective pose on the amidships thwart. He was smoking a cigar he had shoplifted the previous afternoon in the drugstore. The cigar was of reduced quality, having been on display for several weeks. It had a dry, acrid taste and there were patches of green rot in the wrapper. He re-

moved it from his mouth and eyed it with repugnance, wishing there was some way he could lodge a complaint without risking the loss of his liberty. He was a recognized but trivial shoplifter and had not been known to squander actual cash for a cigar during his seventy years' intermittent residence in the town.

At the shack, Uncle Veenie rested comfortably in the morning sun, opening and eating little necks from a mesh bag. He had his cap off, the better to soak up the beneficent rays. What with the tide flowing, he had gone after his boats and anchored them closer in. The water glistened on his waders.

"Come up, folkses," he cried in his warming tones of unqualified friendliness. "I was enjoying a few little necks to settle my breakfast. It's seldom I have them to home, for my wife holds that taken to excess they produce gas."

"What did you have for breakfast today, Uncle Veenie?" asked the girl.

"I had my usual, Joanie. I like a little something to break the fast. An orange, coffee, a dish of porridge, bacon and eggs, toast, rolls, a banana, and a bowl of Jello will revive my stomach without shock. There's some," he went on with emphasis, "that prefer to stuff themselves at each opportunity, but I regard it as shiftless, the same as overdrinking. Take care of your stomach, and your stomach will take care of you. I've always said it."

"Let's take care of my stomach with a few clams," said the girl.

Captain Cobb waded in from his dory, carrying the outsized bass. Seeing it, Uncle Veenie dropped the mesh bag and leaped up from his bench. "Boy oh boy oh boy!" he cried excitedly "She's a record-buster for sure. Where'd you get it, Ezra? I never heard of you catching any bass, not legitimately anyways. You lift it out of a beach car?"

"Surf casting," said Captain Cobb.

Bill and the girl looked up in surprise.

"I got it on the second throw. It put up a considerable fight."

"Why, Ezra," said Uncle Veenie, "you haven't got a surf rod in that dory? What'd you use to cast with—an oar?"

"I borrowed a rod." "

"Who from?" asked the girl innocently.

"A man," said Captain Cobb. "I aim to enter this fish in the Buzzards Bay Striped Bass Derby. They tell me they're giving away a station wagon automobile. I want to get the car and sell it."

"You'll have to take her up to the official weighing station at Nickerson's," said Uncle Veenie. "Now it'd be my last desire to bring offense, but they're uncommon particular about that Derby and there ain't a soul up to Nickerson's that'd believe you on oath. Not since old man Smithers died, there isn't, and he was addle-headed and would believe anybody."

"I've got witnesses," said Captain Cobb.

Bill studied him curiously. "You mean me?"

"You and Joanie," said the Captain.

"The idea is, you want me to swear I saw you bring in the bass on a surf rod."

"I'll swear it on anything you can name," said the girl. "It's as clear as daylight to me. I remember you casting there, and the fish striking, and then the beautiful fight."

"It tried my powers to turn him," agreed Captain Cobb.

"So be it," said Bill. "Tell them I'll be glad to testify if needed. But no television. I stand on my rights."

Uncle Veenie had been examining the fish in his mild, admiring way. "Bless my soul if I can find any manner of hookmarks, forward or aft. You didn't lasso him?"

"Fish swallowed the hook," said Captain Cobb.

"Be that as it may, I'd think it wise to mark his mouth a little mite before weighing. I'll trot in and get an atom plug." He returned from the shack with the heavy plug and dug it into the bass's mouth; then he drew it out, haggling it roughly.

"That'll do. I think that might suffice. It's the very thing needed to upholster your statement."

"I'll be back," said Captain Cobb. "Might be they'll require a sworn affidavit, in which case I'll be obliged to collect my witnesses. I don't know," he continued peevishly, "you grow up in a town, work with it, establish your business and lay out your capital—in short, heave and haul for civic betterment all down the line—and what happens? The minute you wish to ease up and realize on your reputation, somebody begins to holler for affidavits. To be open

and candid, I wish I could recover my taxes."

"Why Dave Slade up to the town hall remarked that you hadn't paid in a tax dollar in seventy years, Ezra," said Uncle Veehie. "He deposed that you didn't even cough up your head tax, but always skedaddled off to Florida come polling time. Those were his words," he added. "I only pass them along for what they're worth."

"I decline to involve myself in politics," replied Captain Cobb, picking up his fish to leave. "Besides, the ticket's been weak. I wouldn't care to throw my support one way or the other."

The Captain gone, Uncle Veenie resumed his activities with the little necks. From the mesh bag he took a dozen and laid them out on the smooth board seat. They were fat, and snow-white, having lain in clean fine sand on the Bay side of the outer beach. "You want a sharp, thin-bladed knife," he said. In his left hand he held a clam, the long curved rim outward; then he laid the knife edge lightly against the meeting point of the shells and exerted quick pressure with the finger tips of his left hand. "When the blade slides in," he said, "cut the muscles aloft and alow, then prize up the top shell and scoop the meat into a neat bundle. That way you can gollop the juice and devour the clam without waste." He gave the first one to Joan, who tossed it off hungrily. The juice was salty and cold, the meat pearly, firm, and notable for a sweet, nutty, sea-food flavor to be found in no other clams anywhere.

"My lord, but those are good," she said. "And about the opening, I go through the same motions, but nothing happens. They won't play ball."

"That's because you joggle them up. You don't want to arouse a clam—grip him soft, or he'll clamp right down. And if they get real frisky," he said, "numb them with cold. Place them in the icebox or deep down in a stretch of shady sand. There's nothing like cold to make a clam let go all holds."

By the time she had eaten nine she had developed an urgent thirst, and she said, "If you don't mind, Uncle Veenie, I'll try a little of that rum. If you'll just pass the bottle over——"

Uncle Veenie gave a tolerant laugh but replied, "No, I shouldn't recommend it. It isn't meet and proper. Rum isn't the natural partner of clams. A good many say it cooks them right in the stom-

ach, with distress to follow. You're altogether too young. No, it requires brass fittings for that work. I'd strongly advise you to take a few beers instead. You'll find a number of cans on the floor;—"

"You'll drink water," said Bill. "There's a glass bottleful right inside the door."

As the sun sailed higher, out of the indigo sea and into the paler blue overhead, strollers appeared on the beach. Now a man in uncomfortable jacket and starched new "fishing cap" approached the shack and inquired pleasantly, "I see you advertise oil paintings?"

"It's not misrepresented, son," replied Uncle Veenie. "I haven't set them out yet this morning consequence of eating clams."

"The missus would like a souvenir of our visit. Something about the ocean."

"Appears to me you've come to the right place," said Uncle Veenie judiciously. "I don't know that I've got a single scene where the ocean don't figure in some way, either as hinddrop or centerpiece. Yes, if it's ocean you're after I can accommodate you. Sit down and have some clams."

"At nine-thirty in the morning?"

"Say a drop of rum then."

The extreme saltiness of his surroundings seemed to exhilarate the visitor, for he perched himself on the edge of the bench and said, "Well, I don't mind if I do," and he added, "I used to be in the Navy myself. In the First World War, only we never got out of Hampton Roads." He downed part of the rum Uncle Veenie had poured out in a water glass, wincing horribly.

"Fine," he said. "First-rate. That's the real stuff."

After refilling his glass, Uncle Veenie went after the pictures. He laid out half a dozen on the bench on the north side of the shack, propping them up against the shingles. Weaving slightly, the visitor surveyed them with a knowing look.

"You do these?" he asked keenly.

"No," said Uncle Veenie, "I can't say that I did. An artist out of New York was responsible for this work. He comes down each summer, and leaves the products here on consignment. Pretty, aren't they? Note the trees. There ain't a tree within sight here.

but that didn't bother him. He painted them in, out of his head."

"Aren't these pictures a little blurred?"

"That's only because they were in the water," said Uncle Veenie reassuringly. "The shack toppled over in the winter, and the products floated a little mite. The damage is largely to the frames. Anyhow, I'd calculated to take that into consideration with the price."

"The missus was hoping to have a boat or two in the foreground—bottom up, if possible."

Uncle Veenie slapped his knee in triumph. "Now I knew you were going to say that. And it's the very reason the artist had the foresight to leave some materials. You select your picture, I'll supply the boat."

"You mean you'll paint it in?"

"Dory, skiff, knockabout, whatever you choose up to mains'l and jib. I wouldn't care to go into anything larger—I haven't had the practice."

"How much do they run?"

"With one boat?"

"A dory pulled up and turned over—in this picture of the shack and the palm trees."

"Palm trees?" asked Bill. He walked around to look.

"The artist I mentioned is a funny feller," said Uncle Veenie. "He said he takes his inspiration from a foreign man named Rousseau that sticks in lions and tigers at odd places. I don't care for the palm trees myself."

"I don't mind the palms," said the visitor. "They kind of set it off. But I wouldn't want any tigers. The missus isn't partial to them."

"You needn't worry about that. I announced to the artist that he could omit the tigers. 'They won't sell,' I said, 'and worse than that, they look unseamanly.'"

"How much for two pictures, including three boats altogether?"

"I've been getting ten dollars a product, add fifty cents for boats. I'll knock the two down, equipped, for seventeen-fifty. Now you couldn't get fairer than that in any museum in the country."

"Sold," the man said, and he tacked back to the bench.

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Uncle Veenie got out a child's box of water colors and set to work. He was amazingly adept. I've never seen him make an ungraceful motion, thought Bill. He gets in and out of boats like a ballet dancer, and he moves impossible weights around by a system of leverage that looks as if he isn't lifting at all. They're all born with co-ordination around here. It comes from ten generations of people trying to keep their balance on heaving water.

The job was finished in twenty minutes. There was a gray boat with red trim, a red one, and a bright blue one. They were blended into the composition with professional ease and improved the pictures several times over.

"Why, Uncle Veenie, you're good!" said Joan.

"They have rhythm," agreed the buyer, passing along an observation the missus had picked up in a high-toned magazine, with critics.

"I don't regard myself as too forceful an artist," replied Uncle Veenie. "Good Samuel down the beach can paint rings around me. He could set up a brigantine—sails, spars, and rigging—while I was concerned with a Cape Cod cat. In the line of speed-painting, he's two tacks and a reach ahead of anybody in these parts."

"Well, I'm satisfied," said the visitor, and shaking hands around, he made off toward the town. Simultaneously, Captain Ezra Cobb came up from the opposite direction. He was counting bank notes with a look of ripe exultation.

"Fourteen-forty," he said. "She went fifty-seven and a half pounds, or thirty-two pounds of fillets. As nice a morning's haul as I can remember during any June in recent years."

"I thought the fish was for the Derby," said Joan.

"They only weighed and photographed it, and charged me a dollar entrance fee. And you'll be glad to know I'm in the clear on that. The mention of responsible witnesses turned the trick. For the rest, the Bars Inn was pleased to have the fillets. I'd enjoy knowing how they mean to employ them—they can use them for ballast if they run out of lead."

"I've just taken in seventeen-fifty, Ezra," said Uncle Veenie. "I netted it from the sale of two pictures, with a round of boats as deck cargo."

"Minus the artist's share, you mean," said the girl.

"No, the sum will run pure profit. I noted in the paper where the artist had suffered a nasty spill in his bathtub, and passed on, about midway through December. He left no widow that I am aware of."

"Wouldn't the pictures revert back to the estate?" asked Captain Cobb.

"No, I hardly think they would," said Uncle Veenie with an amiable smile. "So far as I know, there wasn't anybody aware of the existence of these products outside of the artist and myself. And I don't intend to go sticking in my nose where it's none of my business. Let the dead past bury its dead, and make it apply equally to pictures."

"The argument has logic," said Bill.

"Well, I'll eat my words," said Captain Cobb. "The summer's getting off to a rosy start."

"I predicted a general upswing in business," said Uncle Veenie. "I mentioned it yesterday, as you may recollect."

"There's a moral in it," said Captain Cobb. "Start with a deserving man and a worthy project, let him work and dig and persevere and keep at it, in the face of any adversity, and sooner or later he'll win through. I can submit that it's so in my case. Here I've been hankering to go to the dog track at Taunton, and Providence finally saw fit to bless my rod and reel. This could stand us a lesson for everybody."

"Ezra, take it from a responsible witness," said Bill. "You've gone a mite too far."

On the day of the Wilsons' party, in Provincetown, Bill arose with a sense of indefinite foreboding that only resolved itself with specificity midway through his shave

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He avoided nicking himself and refrained from throwing down the razor in disgust. It was a bleak assignment, in a region he loathed with articulate passion. Why is it, he asked himself, that the world's prettiest little town in the winter, perched on a finger-nail far out in the ocean, white and shiny, surrounded by alpine dunes, cut up by cobbled lanes and crowded with trim, bright, picturesque houses refreshingly unmodern, must be turned in the summer into the world center of freaks, eccentrics, charlatans, beards, bomb throwers, near-miss artists and writers, and general all-around poseurs and bores? Scarcely a day went by that some climber from the high cerebral ranges of New York or Boston wasn't arrested for reading aloud from Franz Kafka while seated nude and holding an umbrella on the courthouse steps.

Moreover he didn't like the Wilsons. Wilson was an advertising executive who felt that the T-Zone was the only sacrosanct area left in America. He would as soon attack his throat with unadvertised nicotine as spray his mother with mustard gas. His wife was an even greater fool, for she was taken in completely by Wilson. She was proud of her Irish background and referred to her husband as "Himself," evidently unaware that the term was in good repute largely among the Ould Sod's vaudeville commonalty. Their house was an authentic winner, on the outside, but the interior was unbearably flip. Sprinkled about were mementos of various places, selected with an eye to hideousness—cushions from Niagara Falls, ashtrays from Mammoth Cave, a crockery virgin from St. Anne de Beaupré, and several football pennants in commemoration of games between small schools like Ursinus and Hofstra. Ensemble, they seemed to cry out, or advertise, that we know we're in bad taste but that's why we did it—on purpose, see? Myra thought them interesting but the curios in Bill's view only accomplished what might be expected if they had been stuck around in ignorance.

The day was mitigated slightly by the fact that he was picking up Ross and Marge Benson, giving them a ride to and from. Bill considered the Bensons entertaining and admired their integrity. Their detestation of each other had gone so far that they no longer got on each other's nerves but were, in fact, rather good

friends. Ross, who had the greatest contempt for nearly all modern writers, was employed by a publishing house, and his wife, who was childless, also worked, as secretary to a Park Avenue dentist. Though fruitless in the physical sense, their union was blessed by a joint trust fund, the bequest of a misanthropic aunt who had died and gleefully left them irretrievably cemented in fiscal matrimony. Should they part, the money would promptly be employed in the construction of a nationwide chain of hostels for indigent cats. So the Bensons lived on, *en famille*, their hearth warmed by \$60,000 a year, a sum that they divided without squabbling, and more or less went their separate ways. Their decision to seek labor was inspired by that dubious piece of church propaganda, "We needed something to do."

Bill shaved and took a shower, dressed carelessly and went downstairs, hoping to find some fault with breakfast. As a rule he was unbelievably difficult on days when he was compelled to discharge his wife's social contracts.

"Morning," he said, taking up his napkin with an air of haste. "I've got to gobble and go. I'm taking some people down to Monomoy in the inboard."

"You are in the pig's eye," she said. "Today's the Wilsons' party."

"Wilson who?"

"Oh, come on, Bill. Just this once."

"What about all these people that have to get to Monomoy?"

"There aren't any. It's rot. Wearing gray flannel trousers?"

"These are highbrow people. They got class. And money. They're members of the 400."

"I got class and money myself," she said, "and I've got to get to Provincetown."

"All right, I'll go—just this one more time. But I can only stay a minute. I'll drive through town and let you off, and then I'll drive back by and you can throw me a stuffed olive."

At ten-thirty they stopped by the Bensons' place, one of the few authentic "bow roof" houses left on the Cape. As nearly as Bill could determine, curved roofs had been built by sea captains simply because they preferred the look of roofs shaped like inverted

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ships' hulls. There's probably some other reason, something structural, he thought when they turned into the driveway, but I can't remember it. Anyhow the house was a pleasure to the eye, a little gray shingled ship sailing along upside down, a weather vane where a keel ought to be, and lapped at fore and aft by waves of terraced crab grass.

He pulled to a stop and tooted the horn. A window opened presently and Marge Benson's frilly blonde head emerged. She was in a slip and had a bath towel around her shoulders.

"Ross says would you like an old-fashioned?"

"Good lord, no."

"He says neither would he but it's customary to ask."

"Maybe we'll get a drink on the way," said Bill.

Anyhow, he thought, she didn't get a chance to say she'd have one "without the garbage," an expression that caused him active distress. She had a lot of speech tricks that he imagined acted on Benson like sandpaper. At least every half hour she was "intrigued" by something, a harmless creation of a transitive verb that can be dangerous if used to excess. "My, it's drunk out tonight" was a holdover from her house-party phase on the Eastern campuses, from which she had never really recovered. She worked the phrase in when she was strapped for something to say on occasions particularly convivial. Still, he liked her; she was entirely honest and he imagined that she could be fun—she was such a wiggler. On the other side, he could easily see that she might be annoyed by Benson's pace. He was invariably late. There was no single instance during the last ten years to which they could point with pride and say that Benson was on time. He came out to the car now, clad in underwear shorts, and advised that he would rejoin them promptly.

"He's been in the bathroom," said his wife, who had climbed into the back seat. "He's always in the bathroom. Don't ask me why. I don't even want to know."

"Right back," said Benson.

He made it just before eleven but had to return in search of his glasses, his long, sallow, cheerful face inexpressive of worry or haste.

"He's got a slow heartbeat," said his wife. "If we were sprinting for a berth on Noah's Ark, he'd stretch out beside the path and take a nap."

"Well, he'll live forever," said Bill.

"Not if I run across something good in the firearms line, he won't."

Through the outskirts of Orleans, Bill said, "It's getting on toward noon. We might stop and have a drink. There's a place called the Orleans Inn, very handy off the road to the right."

They went downstairs to a bar and sat on stools and had whiskey sours. Besides themselves and the bartender, only two other persons were in the room—a fat man seated in a booth and trying to sell something called Fibratex to a representative of the house, who drummed on the table and looked bored.

"It'll knock out the racket," cried the fat man. "You could put Cab Calloway down here and the people upstairs would sleep like babies."

"This is nice," said Benson. "Very peaceful. Why don't we stay on here and make a day of it?"

"Couldn't be better," said Bill, taking off his jacket. "If the salesman gets too noisy, we can buy some Fibratex and wall him off."

"Put it back," said his wife. "What about the Wilsons?"

"Who is this Wilson anyway?" asked Benson.

"He's the one with the sort of funny nose that did tricks with an ice bucket last year at the Yacht Club."

"Not the fellow with the advertising agency? The drunk?"

"That's Wilson," said Bill. "He's in the middle of his T-Zone period. Two years ago it was jockey shorts."

They had another drink and went on toward Provincetown, through the pitch pines near Wellfleet and into the moors and salt marshes of Truro.

"I'd like to go up to the Highland Light, if you don't mind turning off," said Benson, "and see if I can spit into the ocean from the bluff. The wind's just right."

"Not at all," said Bill.

"Well, we'd mind," said Mrs. Benson. "We're expected for a

buffet lunch. At the Wilsons'."

"Always liked a buffet lunch," said Benson. "Very few times in my life I've passed up a buffet lunch."

A few minutes later, winding down the hill toward Provincetown, with the big dunes on the right and the Pilgrim Monument faintly visible through the haze, Bill said, "Now it starts. First, all these nasty little summer shacks exactly alike and named after flowers—what do you think of that? Petunia, Hollyhock, Bog Myrtle, Spirochete——"

"There isn't any flower named Spyro Keats," said Mrs. Benson. "That's the Greek movie king. I see him in the newsreels, with a whole bunch of Warners behind him—giving each other trophies."

"Spyros Skouras, and a fat lot you know about it," said Benson. "You know less about horticulture than anybody I know. Our friend Bill could make you look sick in horticulture. He's got a green thumb. If he says spirochete, that mean's he's planted them with his own hands."

Along the flat straight stretch toward the village, past the tourist courts in riotous bloom beside the Bay, the traffic thickened unnaturally.

"I think some of these people are going to a funeral," said Myra. "They've got their parking lights on."

At the intersection where the one-way lane starts into town, a swarthy man with a black arm band stood brandishing a metal wand, directing part of the procession up the normal exit route to the right. Waving affably, Bill swung to the right and speeded up slightly to close the gap between him and the next car ahead.

"You're in the funeral line, you poor idiot. Pull over," cried his wife.

"It goes right by the Wilsons'. Much quicker."

By the time they reached their hosts', the cars were packed bumper to bumper and a patrolman by the side of the road, in front of the Wilsons' house, was keeping the long queue moving.

"Now you've done it, you irreverent baboon. You're right in the middle of a full-blown funeral."

Benson leaned forward and said, "If I may suggest it, perhaps you ought to turn on your parking lights."

Signs pointing to parking spaces were established at various spots near a big church ahead, and a second patrolman signaled them to turn into a vacant space.

"It'll only take a few minutes," said Bill. "We needn't go to the cemetery."

"I remember now," said Benson, getting out. "I saw it in the paper. It's Silvera, the waterfront boss. Beyond a shadow of a doubt the greatest scoundrel this town has ever known. Silvera the fish-hog, they called him."

"That's a fine way to speak of a man who's passed on," said his wife.

"Natural or violent causes?" asked Bill.

"He was found fallen off a wharf, but it was anticipated that he'd been clubbed."

"Well, we've all got to go."

An excited undertaker's helper came running up from a side door of the church.

"You relations of the deceased?"

"Relations my foot," cried Mrs. Benson. "We were on our way to a buffet lunch——"

"Please," said Bill in a kindly voice, holding up one hand in a gesture of restraint. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

"I need somebody to set up chairs," said the helper. "I don't know how you feel, but I think we're going to have the biggest turnout in five years. I told Mr. Snorkle this morning, I said it'll be a record-breaker, you can mark my word."

"I thought all these Portuguese were Catholics," said Mrs. Benson.

"Deceased broke with the Mother Church," said the helper. "He was a very headstrong man, Mr. Silvera."

"We'll be glad to lend a hand," said Bill. "Now hold up—I have a shooting stick in the trunk. Would that be useful?"

"Mr. Snorkle said to accommodate the bereaved in any fashion we could. I'll just slip on these arm bands so's you can get through the lines."

"See here," said Mrs. Benson, "we came up to Provincetown to go to a buffet lunch. What's Mr. Snorkle to me, or me to Mr.

Snorkle? I never heard of him. Anyhow I thought a snorkle was something that went on a submarine. Come on, Myra."

"Mr. Snorkle is the executive mortician," said the helper stiffly. "If you'll follow me, sir."

Bill got the shooting stick out of the car; then he and Benson slipped through the side door into the church. Two other helpers were unfolding chairs in an anteroom. "You can each pick up a couple," whispered the guide. "We can begin placing them in the aisles."

"By the way," said Benson, "we're dressed for a party. Aren't these jackets uncommonly gaudy for a funeral?"

"In Provincetown?" said the helper. "There'll be people here in bathing suits."

It was a pleasant, cool church, nearly filled already. The balcony, always the first choice at a funeral of curiosity, was packed tight, and so were the back rows downstairs. And as the helper had indicated, the crowds were still streaming through both front doors. Setting up his chairs, Bill noticed his wife and Mrs. Benson coming in, and he went up to them courteously. "I can place you in the first three rows, or you can sit on chairs in the aisle. Tell you what, Marjorie, why don't you take this?" He opened up the stick and handed it to her, but she kicked it aside; then they went on down to the third row where they were jammed in among some fishermen, who seemed glad to have them. Benson used the shooting stick, in the middle of a group sitting and standing beneath a stained-glass window featuring the Ascension. Bill found a place at the end of the second row.

A Reverend Waldbeser, a Cape Cod man, delivered the obituary, taking his text from Jonah, and specifically Jonah 2:5: "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head." In his analogy, Reverend Waldbeser sought to show that Silvera, like Jonah, had suffered tribulations so distressing, alongshore, that he frequently put to sea to flee them, as it were. He mentioned Nineveh as being symbolic of the wickedness currently rampant in Provincetown, a statement that Bill thought a trifle severe, and he hoped that the unregenerate among them, naming no

names, would try to straighten up a little, especially on Saturday nights. The watery road from Joppa to Tarshish, he said, was tumultuous, as claimed in the Bible, but probably no more tumultuous than that between P-town (sic) and the Grand Banks, a trip he had made nearly as often as any man in the house. Documenting this assertion, he called attention to a record haul of 95 boxes of halibut and cod his boat had taken one day during the summer of 1939. This provoked a great deal of head-shaking and satisfied exclamations from his audience, and persuaded him to observe that you could fish in the Mediterranean till you were blue in the face and you'd be lucky if you came home with a bucketful of sand eels. "They've run out of halibut," he said, "and they never had any cod—the water's too warm." In the case of Silvera, the Reverend continued, the deceased had many fine qualities as they all knew: He could cast a No. 3 tin-clad farther into the surf than any man ever seen on the lower Cape; he had a kind of genius with disabled diesel engines, particularly of the displacement type; and he was still unmatched at the two-hand hoist with an untapped beer keg. Despite all this, said Reverend Waldbeser, what had happened could stand as a warning to everybody, not only blue-water sailors but landsmen as well. He called for hymn 68.

Arising to sing, Bill concluded that it had been a corking good sermon and gave Silvera exactly the right kind of send-off. When he finished the last verse, he became aware of a conspicuously dramatic-looking blonde who had glanced at him over her shoulder two or three times during the music. Now, as the Reverend Waldbeser gave some instructions about proceeding to the cemetery, she turned again and whispered something unintelligible. The prayer was then undertaken and concluded, a lengthy effort that recalled both Jonah and Silvera but seemed, for a change, to give Silvera a distinct edge, as being a native and a contemporary.

Promptly after the prayer, the front row was visited by Mr. Snorkle, the executive mortician himself, an emaciated beanpole wearing morose attire and a look of official prostration. Leaning over the blonde, he offered her his arm, gave her an oily smirk of reassurance, and confided that, "It's time we left for the in-

terment."

"I'm going with him," she said, pointing at Bill. "It's all arranged."

The undertaker lifted his eyebrows and hung up uncertainly.

"Trot along, Buster," she added.

Thus repulsed, Snorkle recoiled but made a clammy recovery and then managed an unctuous retreat without any loss of dignity.

"Let's get out of here," said the blonde unceremoniously. Taking her arm, Bill led her through the side door.

"I'm the widow," she said outside. "My God, what a mess."

"Death is always a sad time," said Bill, somewhat doubtful which line to take.

"Sad? Over that creep? Did you know him?"

"I never had the pleasure."

"He was the worst horse's ass I ever met, and I'm in show business."

Benson came up, carrying the shooting stick, and Bill introduced him, ending lamely, "Mrs. Silvera was formerly in the theatre."

She giggled. "You might call it that. I was doing a belly dance in Scollay Square when this moron showed up with his big talk. He said he owned a fishing fleet and all I'd have to do was lollygag around on the sand and read magazines. I haven't read a damn thing but recipes since we got married, and that was two years ago. I could use a snort."

"It just happens that we were en route to a buffet lunch," said Bill. "We got in the wrong line of traffic."

"We'll be glad to take you to the cemetery to see your husband buried, or to the buffet lunch," Benson amplified in a sympathetic tone. "You choose."

"Op to lunch," she said. "I've had the funeral."

At the car, Bill presented the widow without explanation to his wife and Marjorie Benson, and they drove off rapidly down the road toward Wilsons', before the other cars had begun to form in line. He and Benson were still wearing their arm bands.

"I was sorry to hear about your husband," said Mrs. Benson, breaking a little silence.

"Stow it," said Mrs. Silvera.

At the Wilsons' she brightened up and threw off the cares and annoyances of the day. After being introduced to such of the crowd as would pay any attention, she announced that she had to "go to the little girls' room," from which she returned to drink three whiskeys neat. Midway through the second, the funeral procession came rolling along, and she made her way to the front porch, with a couple of male attendants, and waved her handkerchief.

The Wilsons' guests were motley by type, and dressed to match. There was the usual contingent of Truro psychiatrists, all discussing politics; at least a dozen Provincetown artists, of which group the females were seated cross-legged at various places on the floor, although chairs were available; a famous silver and leather craftsman, and his wife, who was augmented by rings, bracelets, pins, and necklaces of tortuous design and trussed from the shins down in sandals with multiple thongs attached, in the manner of pull wires on a puppet; Moffet, the beautifully dressed yachtsman, an elderly ruin who owned a yawl but hadn't been outside Race Point in years; Gloria Peters, a striking redhead with deathly pale skin, the best-known nymphomaniac on the lower Cape, advertised in her circle as the ablest performer since Jenny the Factory, together with her torpid and ailing husband, a cotton broker; a lot of writers and actors; the Merrivales, who had inherited riches and bought an anti-capitalist newspaper; a delicatessen runner who had delivered some hors d'oeuvres and had been pressed to remain; a number of people Bill didn't know; and an extremely sedate couple from Philadelphia, by way of Wellfleet, who looked as though they had got into the wrong house but were too polite to leave.

Wilson himself, in full bottle dress, was beet-red and rattling a pair of mahogany bones (a transient craze) in accompaniment to phonograph music—some recordings by a grief-stricken horse crooner named Guthrie. Every time he puts on that striped jacket he becomes poisonously offensive, thought Bill. It's automatic, like dressing for a prize fight.

Wilson came over to resume the old argument.

"What do you think of our new campaign?" he demanded, blowing damply.

"What campaign?"

"The doctors' survey. And the T-Zone."

"I never heard of it," said Bill. "There isn't any such thing as a T-Zone." For a change, Wilson was too far gone to pursue the discouraging tête-à-tête. Crossing the room, he took the arm of a gesticulating artist in bulging red bathing trunks, and said indignantly, pointing at Bill, "*That man's a communist!*" It was an unfortunate choice; the artist he selected had been a party organizer for nearly six years. Hearing the news, he shot a companionable glance at Bill and resumed his aggrieved monologue on the dangers of the FBI.

The luncheon was served at five-thirty, by which time the Bensons had had a fight and gone off in separate cars.

Bill found Myra in the children's playroom, where she had been talking to Hogg, the cubist portrait painter.

"You're going pretty good," he said. "How's the old pressure?"

"He likes me. He admires the planes of my torso. He said he'd like to go back in the dunes and paint my breasts."

"Don't you let him," said Bill. "You'll never get it off—not even with turpentine. It has to wear off."

"You should worry."

Going home, she said, "Why'd you marry me? I've always wondered."

"For the planes in your torso."

"Why, really?"

"For the parties in Provincetown."

"I don't admire you, Bill. Nothing could make me."

"You'll feel better tomorrow," he told her.

5 ■ ■ Myra was sick the next day, and called in a doctor, who advised her to drink plenty of water and get some

rest. When Bill approached her room, she sent him away, saying, "Please go have some fun. I want to think things out."

"I'm not clear about the nature of my crime, but I'll be glad to apologize. I'll sign anything."

"You as much as gave me a green light to toss around in the dunes with Freddie Hogg," she said. "It seems we've gone that far."

"I remember nothing of the kind. It isn't true. I absolutely forbid you to go out in the dunes with anybody under eighty."

"What do you hear from Mrs. Silvera?"

"The last time I saw her she was arranging to attend a trombone recital with Professor Bergson."

"Press on, Bill. Get Joan and ask Alice to put up a picnic. I want you to be gay and bright while I lie here looking at these old walls."

Turning to go, he said, "Myra, I have no wish to add to your mysterious burden, but you have never risen to sappier heights."

Joan was in a deck chair on the sea side of the house, holding a hand mirror and plucking her eyebrows. "You know," she said, "my style's changed, very subtly. Last year the aura was slightly Crawford, dark, thoughtful, possibly tragic. Now it's more Marilyn Monroe—the laughing minx. And do you know why?"

"Why?"

"I've conquered adolescence. I quit fighting it. Most people fight it—that's why they skulk and their skin gets pocky."

"Omit the details. If you can quit skulking behind those tweezers, we'll push off down the Bay."

"Myra having the hystics again?"

"Your sister's ill," he said. "Don't be so damned impertinent."

At Uncle Veenie's shack, preparations were afoot to go combing on the inside of Morris Island. A southwest wind had blown all the previous day, and Nantucket Sound had been seriously roiled. When Bill and Joan touched shallow water with their outboard, Uncle Veenie was carrying out his motor. His dog, Mill Ends, a Cairn terrier presented by a summer fisherman of two seasons past, was already seated in the skiff, its recent injury attested only by an inconspicuous gap in its teeth.

"I'm hopeful of locating several large planks. Ezra took the

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fair tide down with his dory, some two hours back."

He had a bottle of water in his skiff, his rum, two rods, and his shellfish knife. "We'll point in to the Oyster Creek and rake the bottom for lunch. You can't beat a few oysters on a day like this. Like as not, too, we'll recover some scallops that might otherwise fall prey to starfish before the scalloping season begins. Besides which I happen to know that the warden's boat is laid up for repairs."

Sun glints on the reflectors of Chatham Light, when they went by, gave it an illusory look of incandescence. Stark and grim even on cheerful days, it thrust skyward from its high bluff in sober warning, in times past the last living land thing seen by scores of ships that had shaved the bars too close in the teeth of north-east storms. Their hulks littered the bottom from Provincetown to Buzzards Bay. On still days you could venture out and see them lying in shallow water, the small fish steering around the dark, rotting baulks and the occasional flashes of imperishable brass.

Uncle Veenie, a few dozen yards ahead, skirted a row of anchored knockabouts and made way for the Coast Guard whale-boat, a white, self-bailing marvel that flipped back up if it turned over. He waved to the crew of local boys and the middle-aged warrant officer at the wheel. The station was currently in fine repute in the town, having discredited the Navy by unsticking a destroyer that had ignominiously sanded up within full view of Light Point. The operation verified what most of the residents had suspected all along—that one Cape Cod man was worth about nine government sailors and that the Navy should never have been allowed to put to sea in the first place.

In the cut-through to Stage Harbor the water was low, and they had to wade and tow for a hundred yards. Then Bill followed Uncle Veenie in a labyrinthine course through the harbor. He passed close under the counter of the *Paradise Bird*, a cocktail ketch that ran mostly to brightwork and mahogany, then swung in near the icehouse, tempted to buy some squid and drift the harbor for plaice.

Of all the fish taken from the coastal waters of Chatham—flounder, bluefish, striped bass, porgie, tautog, plaice, mackerel

and the like—he esteemed plaice the highest, for eating. But he narrowed the space between his boat and Uncle Veenie's and crossed the flats to the mouth of the Oyster Creek. It was one of those winding tidal rivulets that slice up salt marshes everywhere—sandy mud on the bottom between grassy banks, and warmish water for fish to laze in on sunny days.

In half an hour's time, sloshing along with a bucket, they had picked up three dozen oysters and a double handful of scallops. In addition, Uncle Veenie had raked some really memorable quahaugs, for bait, and had gilled a three-pound flounder that appeared to be under the influence of a sedative.

"He was having a nap. They'll lie just over a rip for food, and then they'll waggle up here and sleep. Again, you might say that they vary the same as people do. In human life, now, this fellow would have been one of those sleepyheads. Like Joanie here."

"Not like Joanie," she said. "Not any more. Joanie bounces out of bed to see what's going on."

"It may be you're right," said Uncle Veenie.

A big blue crab clawed out from under an overhanging tuft and made off sideways upstream. Uncle Veenie pinned it down with his gig; then he reached over deftly and lifted it out, its legs going like a velocipede.

"Ain't he a beauty? Succulent, too, and tender as paste. But burn me if they aren't ornery to prepare. My wife won't give one house room, and I can't say as I blame her."

Restored to water, the crab backed rapidly away, holding up its claws in a gesture of defiance.

They took their catch and started off again toward Nantucket Sound, winding carefully over the fast-shallowing flats and into the channel at the red-can buoy. Harding's Beach Point, an exciting place, the jumping-off spot for adventures down deserted Morris Island and into the smoky Sound, lay ahead on the right, the channel water racing around the white spit of sand and into the foam of trivial surf outside. Despite the winds of the previous day, the surface on out to the far horizon was glassy and silent, with only a roller-coaster swell to give it life.

"Uncle Veenie's signaling," said Joan. "He's waving and point-

ing."

Bill stood up, cutting down his speed as they ran out of the channel and into the swell.

"He's spotted a flock of birds—they're snapping at the water like in bluefish season. Out near the traps."

He pushed up abreast of the skiff, in which Uncle Veenie was still gesticulating. "Bluefish running!" yelled the latter. "Get upstream and come down on them with the tide."

Bill gave the wheel over to Joan and jumped back into the cockpit. He slid his two rods out from under the thwart and unsnapped their lures. One rod had on an octopus hook, with a dried remnant of squid—from plaice fishing—and the other had a blue atom plug, relic of an unsuccessful trolling sortie for bass. From the tackle box built into the boat he took two new Japanese feathers, spotless and white, with sizable chromium hooks, and snapped them onto the safety pins at the ends of the nylon lines.

"Cut it off," he said to Joan. "Cut off right here and we'll drift. They're coming this way."

"If you think I'm going to sit here and knit while you catch bluefish, you're crazy. Give me one of those rods."

"Later," he said in an agitated undertone. "When we've tested out the school."

"Either now or I boo and splash up the water."

"You'll stay home next time," he said, and handed over a rod. She took it and crawled on hands and knees up onto the forward deck.

Near the fish weir—a long line of smooth sharpened stakes with a circle of nets at the end—the gulls were setting up a nervous racket, sweeping, crying, and snapping at the water as the school drove the small bait fish to the surface. At that moment Ezra Cobb's dory shot out from behind the nets; his cracked and reddened face was set in determined lines and his right arm was whirling like a lariat thrower's.

"Ezra's heaving and hauling."

The school took a quick violent jog to the left, flip-flapping the water. A fish about a foot long leaped out, hung in the air a moment, then fell back with an inviting smack.

Unable to wait, Joan, crouching on her knees to offset the swell, cast with a smart, unfeminine overarm snap; the feather fell about twelve feet short of the advancing line.

"Maybe you'll wait next time." Bill's lure sang over her head and fell inside the churning circle, startling the fish into another brief run. Cranking his reel rapidly—a spinner he'd bought in Golfe Juan—he drew in the line in little jerks and dashes. The tip of his rod suddenly whipped out of the sky and into the front seat as a bluefish hit the feather and streaked out of the school. The fish jumped and shook, then headed for the bottom, hauling the line out fast through the drag. When he finally turned it, it pulled in a tight curve around the stern, jumped twice more, and then came fighting out of the water and into the boat.

"Keep your feet out of the way," Bill yelled. "He'll take off a toe." But she was busy with a fish, and he noticed that Uncle Veenie, astraddle the middle thwart of his skiff, had one coming in, too.

The haul lasted twenty minutes, during which the four of them, including Ezra, took twenty-six fish that ran about three pounds each. Their shade was a beautiful gun-metal blue and, savage in the boats, they slashed at everything within reach. "They'll tear you to pieces," Bill said. "For plain cussedness, they make a shark look like a sardine. I see Uncle Veenie's got a finger bitten."

"A slice across the knuckles," cried the old man cheerfully. "They're in nowise a neighborly fish, but once out of water they die in a hurry. What's more, we'd best go ashore and gut them. Exposed to the sun, they release an acid that eats right through and makes them pulpy."

"I spotted the school," said Captain Cobb, pulling his dory up between them. "I spotted it when I was making to land on Morris Island. You could say that we've got me to thank for it all."

"I hope we aren't poaching, Ezra," said Uncle Veenie anxiously. "If you reared this school, we'll be glad to make it right in a money way. Might even be they were pets?"

"What I wish to know," continued Captain Cobb, "is why bluefish ventured into Vineyard Sound at the spring season. Another thing is, they haven't run this large in years."

Uncle Veenie smacked the gunwale of his skiff. "It only bears out my notion concerning business. It's an election year, and the public optimism rises. There's always a chance the government will straighten up and quit thieving. This same spirit affects the fish. They're less cautious—they come out to see what's going on."

"And maybe to vote," said Bill. "Well, it's an arresting theory. My optimism is particularly high at the moment. Let's have lunch."

"Why don't we chase the school?" said Joan. "Why quit now?"

"There isn't a particle of use," said Captain Cobb. "They've quit biting. You can pursue that school to Yarmouth and bring nothing in the boat but weeds and salt spray. Don't ask me the reason—I haven't got it."

"Ah," said Uncle Veenie, "he'd be a lucky one to know that. Volumes have been written on it."

Towing Captain Cobb, they proceeded slowly over the diminishing swells to Inward Point, halfway down the island to the tip called Monomoy. Even at low tide, there was sufficient water to land, and they anchored and went up onto the sand. Again it was noon, of a cool, hazy, breezeless day. Back in the dunes and poverty grass, the mosquitoes hummed in contentment, happy to greet a day without wind. Otherwise, a graveyard quiet was settled over the long strip of land, doubly quiet with the forest hush of noon.

"It's eerie over here," said Bill. "I've always thought so. The ocean itself I can understand. It rips and roars and raises hell and occasionally gets as smooth as a windowpane. But this Sound baffles me. No matter what the weather, it always looks a little murky and mysterious. The boats take strange shapes way out on the water—jigsaw puzzles that shift and disappear. And then these damn deserted buildings—Coast Guards, and old Army camps, and duck blinds of people dead a hundred years. The place is full of ghosts. Nothing here but ghosts."

"And foxes," said Captain Cobb. "You'll find a legion of foxes back in the brush."

"What do they live on?"

"The grapes," said Uncle Veenie. "They munch the sweet little grapes that crawl along the sand. They do say that the old Vikings

came over here originally to get the grapes—hence the name Vineyard hereabouts.”

With an air of martyrdom, and encouraged by Uncle Veenie, Captain Cobb gutted all the fish, standing in water up to his knees and slicing them one by one down the belly with a razorlike knife. So adept were his motions at scooping out the heart, liver, lungs, and intestinal coils that he appeared to be doing it at a single flip per fish. As the evisceration proceeded, he stacked the catch like cordwood on a seat of his dory. They appeared much as before—sleek, wet, blue, with no outward effects of the gutting, the belly slices closed and no blood anywhere.

Followed by his dog, Uncle Veenie made a fire and gathered some clean seaweed, while Bill walked the beach for stones, which he laid in a narrow circle on the fringe of the fire. Joan disappeared around the point, where she took off her dungarees and jersey and swam, without bothering to see if anyone looked. When she came out, she did several halfhearted calisthenics, including some ragged circles with her arms—aimed to keep the bustline high—a round of ankle-slenderers, and an unsuccessful attempt to touch her toes with her knuckles. Waiting to get dry, she followed a fox trail two or three dozen yards back into the dunes. Notwithstanding the coolness of the day, the sun prickled her back and the rubbery sand felt hot on the soles of her feet. For three years she had liked to study people who were unaware they were watched. Now she circled around, avoiding the outthrust bushes, and approached the bank that hung out over the fire. She squatted down, all but sitting in the sand, and followed Bill's progress with the stones. Then, in a few minutes, she got up sleepily and made her way back to her clothes.

For lunch they had the oysters, and Alice's hamper, and a blue-fish apiece, wrapped in seaweed and baked on the stones till the meat was falling apart. They drank the rum left in the bottle—a drink and a half apiece, not counting the girl. Uncle Veenie poured out the last drops for his dog, which licked them off a plank with enthusiasm. “He's somew'at given to fits of howling at odd moments. The rum acts as a therapotic.”

“Maybe he's howling because of the rum,” suggested Bill.

"No, I placed him on the wagon for upwards of two months, and he failed to thrive. He howled pretty nearly all the time."

Alice's hamper had fried chicken, mostly drumsticks and breasts, along with watercress-and-geese-liver sandwiches, a jar of olives, five dill pickles wrapped in oil paper—the good kind, big, taken out of a barrel of brine, and so juicy they ran down your chin when you bit into them—half a chocolate cake, two bottles of rosé wine, a quart thermos of milk, and a pint thermos of coffee with sugar and cream.

"Dear Alice," said Bill, reaching for a drumstick.

"Faithful old retainer that she is," said Joan. She had laid a smoking bluefish on a clean shingle and lifted out the backbone; now she picked up chunks of the meat with her fingers and ate it as she rested between oysters and scallops.

"I've never been partial to watercress," said Uncle Veenie, "but I might say that these sandwiches are tasty. They taste fresh, somehow. They taste like spring."

"It's the other stuff she puts in, little herby secrets, that give them the old punch," said Joan.

"This rosy wine now," said Captain Cobb. "Would you say it was made out of roses? And if so, would it be apt to give a man the rose fever? I have a mite of trouble that way in the greenup season."

Bill poured out half a glass and held it up to the sun, studying the color, which was something between clear amber and light pink. Then he drank it off and said, "No, it's made from the grapes around Beaulieu, where we used to live. Strange grapes, full of all-year Mediterranean sun. As wine of the country it's hard to match."

"Cheap over there, I expect," said Uncle Veenie.

"We used to sit on the terrace of a little inn up on the Grande Corniche, looking down on Eze, and drink it out of pint pewter mugs. Eight cents a mug, I believe it was—of the very best grade, that is."

"*Lapin à bonne femme*," said Joan. "That was the menu. Nothing but rabbit. They brought it to the table in a hideous silver turcen, with whopping big pieces inside, tender and steamy."

Snow-white, too, but better than chicken or turkey. And of course the sauce."

"Not to mention the waiter," said Bill.

"He ogled me brilliantly. Even then he could see I was going to be something."

After lunch they lay back on the sand and slept for an hour, the sun hot in their faces but not too hot with the cool breeze off the water. When they awoke, they spread out and walked down the beach, piling the small finds of treasure in little heaps near the edge, to be easy to see coming back. Deep in the weeds of a flat stretch, between two parallel rows of flotsam marking the receding tides, Uncle Veenie found a glass ball in good condition, of a translucent purple, worth seven or eight dollars in any antique shop. In former times, he told them, the globes—supports for fishermen's nets—were commonplace on the beach, but new methods had made them nearly obsolete. "Still, some wash in from as far as Portugal and Spain," he said, "and then they're aged a nice soft shade, like this one." He held his discovery to be a bright omen, and indeed the beach, after the late spring blow, was laden with riches. In one place, laths were scattered along for a hundred yards—deck cargo that never lasts long during high seas.

Gathering them into bundles, Bill said, "It beats me why it's always necessary to stack lumber on deck. They lose it every two or three trips. You'll find it strewn over beaches everywhere in the world."

"Two reasons," said Uncle Veenie. "It's combustible down below, and again, disregarding that, they like to leave it to the last to stow, since it hasn't any shape, you see, and can be lashed on anywhere."

Captain Cobb found a gigantic wooden spool that filled him with delight. Undamaged by the water, it was painted and weathered a magnificent yellow and had, in square black lettering, "Baltimore Cable Co." inscribed around the cylinder and across both rims. He rolled it down to the sand, stood it on end, and said, "There's a handsome table for a hotel having a lawn saloon. Accommodations for two lovebirds under a tree. They'll comment on

the atmosphere, and write home that everything hereabouts comes out of the sea. They won't be far wrong, either—I was given a remnant of hotel whiskey last week that was likely dipped up out of the Mill Pond."

Up the beach, around a point where a current set in to shore and the bait was running, birds cried and clamored over a mile-long strip. Gulls beating their way against the beginning breeze—terns, plover, sanderlings, yellowlegs, sandpipers standing in rows like toy soldiers. They combed the beach and the sea, resentful of intrusion. A tern circled and, feinting, dove at Joan's head, then made off cursing shrilly.

"That's a very nasty bird, the tern," she said, picking up a lath. "No brotherly love. Out for number one. Climbers."

"They were here first," said Bill. "Pioneers. It's a natural instinct. They have an Old Family complex—they can trace their ancestry clear back to the snake."

Past the next bend they found two dead ducks, sticky with oil, washed up into the dusty miller that grew beside the sand. The sight appeared to enrage Captain Cobb. He turned the ducks over with a stick and said, "There ought to be a law against the dumping overboard of oil within a hundred miles of land. Hardly a summer goes by that we don't see these fellows by the score, gummed up and unable to fly, nothing to do but come ashore and die."

They found three cedar planks nearly ten feet long; a hundred-foot piece of brand-new six-strand rope; several drawers that appeared to be out of a desk, but they couldn't find the desk anywhere; a crate of lemons, most of them rotten; a broom; a very good aluminum teakettle; two big tins of English biscuits; an oak barrel; a rudder that might have come off a ship's boat; three big brass bolts with the screws stripped; an old branch candlestick; a green half-kayak, half-canoe, too badly stove in to be fixable, though Uncle Veenie dragged it up in the bushes so as to have a better look later; a leather-bound book printed in French and still readable here and there; a woman's red silk dress; and an old kedge anchor too heavy to lift.

"In the olden days this would have been turned up by the

anchor-draggers offshore," said Uncle Veenie. "It was a sprightly occupation, and afforded a good living. My daddy put his hand to it when things were dull at the mill."

"Were there actually enough anchors to make it worth while?" asked Bill.

"More than enough. Aside from those ships that foundered, there were many and a one that had to slip anchor in storms. They left them all over the bottom. Anchors didn't haul easy in the old ships. If you got over a bad weedy growth, or tangled up in the rocks, you'd lose an anchor sure. And they didn't have donkey engines, not they. It was a matter of hands tramping around the capstan, and maybe spit in the wind for luck. But mostly it were anchors lost during blows—cut loose or swamp, so naturally they'd cut."

"What did a medium big one bring?"

"I recall an anchor Daddy recovered from a grain ship—we got a hundred dollars. I recollect one month when we pocketed close onto a thousand."

"Then why do anything else?" asked Joan. "Why didn't everybody in town go out in boats and drag the bottom for anchors?"

"Well, sir," said Uncle Veenie, "they mighty near did. But you know, not everybody had an offshore boat. And another point you want to reckon on is the weather. There were some—Chatham men alike—that weren't anxious to go offshore in any kind of small boat. No, you'd be surprised how many is downright mortified of the sea. It's moody hereabouts, as you may have noticed. But hold up—Ezra's shouting—he's discovered something."

Forty yards ahead, Captain Cobb, on all fours, was brushing sand rapidly away from a chalky white object thrust a few inches out of the beach. He seemed unusually excited. His yachting cap was twisted around at an angle, and his smoky-dark glasses had slipped forward on his nose. When they came hurrying up, he called out, "I thought I'd run across a footprint, but it turned out to be a foot. I don't know when I've been caught up so sudden."

A skeleton had been lying in such position that only the sole of one foot was visible, flush with the surface. "I took it for a naked footprint," the Captain kept repeating. "I reckon I'm the only man

in history to stoop over and examine a footprint and find himself staring at a foot. This is the sort of thing Robinson Crusoe would have done if the author had had the imagination." After tearing some of the sand aside, he had lifted the foot up a little; now they scooped away big double handfuls in a frenzy of curiosity, until all of the bones were exposed: a skeleton in perfect articulation, knees drawn up to skull, poised on its shoulders, suggestive of quick mobility, in a fanciful tumbler's whirl. "

"Why it's all there!" cried the girl. "It's—joined!"

"An oddity of the sea," said Uncle Veenie. "In the main, they'll be pounded apart till nought but the skull remains. Again, my cousin Henry and I encountered a wholly-bleached skeleton near Orleans that was still wearing waders. They were well preserved, too; I used them throughout the winter. Yes, we can take a little twine and lash this fellow up so he'll remain intact for years to come."

"But who is it?" asked Joan. "And what do we do now?"

"That's the mystery," said Captain Cobb. "Might be it's old Captain Kidd himself. We'd best haul him back to the shack, I'll prop him up in my dory. You never can tell, this fellow may start us all on the road to fame and fortune."



The news was soon over town that Uncle Veenie and Ezra Cobb had found a skeleton, and people dropped into the shack to investigate. Their motive was mainly curiosity, but a few had genuine reason to be interested. The Higgins family, which had lost an uncle, Thaddeus Higgins, during the height of the rumrunning after the First World War, came in with some hope of identification. The accident had taken place near what was now Harding's Beach Shores, in the Sound, and the body was never recovered, there having been a strong offshore blow for sev-

eral days afterwards.

Uncle Veenie and Ezra, in company with Bill and Joan, were helpful and polite to all the visitors. Uncle Veenie even escorted Mrs. Arlene Higgins into the shack, with a hand under her arm, saying, "It's an anxious time, trying to make certain of our dear ones, particularly when all the meat has slid off and gone."

"Thaddeus had a distinctive length of shin," she replied, treading the board path around the side. "He was as long from crotch to instep as any Cape man of my acquaintance. If it's Thad, I'll know him in a minute."

"There are some that will take this amiss," said Uncle Veenie, "but I'll remark that Thaddeus Higgins' drowning was wholly useless and foolhardy, the result of heaving-to to jettison——"

"There now! I've said so myself many a time," cried Mrs. Higgins with heat. "It was the native stinginess of Harwichporters, a quality I can't tolerate in man or beast. They would heave to, and in a tempest. Nothing else would do. 'We'll get a bearing and make sure of the liquor,' said old man Atkinson. Didn't the Coffin brothers always unload under way? And did they lose any cargo to speak of? I warned Thad and I warned him—'Don't boat out with Harwichporters,' I said. You could drag a seinc through the town and not come up with a single honest man."

"Well," said Uncle Veenie soothingly, "it's over and done, and maybe it's for the best. Every thing's swapped around now. Could be, Thaddeus wouldn't have been happy in this day and age. Rum-running's defunct as a career industry. There isn't any future in it, nor any profit save for the tax. In addition to which all the fun went out when they made it legal."

Mrs. Higgins surveyed the bones and rejected them as having any family connection. "I wouldn't chance a burial," she said. "If those are Thad's shins, I'm a Hottentot. They're foreshortened, and they're lightly bowed. Interding no disrespect to the dead," she added with a pious look.

A Mrs. Gumpert, relict of Obediah Gumpert, visited the shack on a mission revolving around insurance. Three years previously, Gumpert, one of the most notoriously henpecked men on Cape Cod, concluded a successful cranberry season, tapped a few bank

explained to Uncle Veenie. "If the truth were known, we haven't outright proof that this was a seafaring man. For all we know he might have stumbled into the water while searching for gooseberries. The telescope will authenticate it, and maybe brisken him up." A suggestion of Bill's that a bottle of rum be placed in the rib cage was rejected, and the lecture went ahead.

Addressing the crowd, Captain Cobb called attention first to the chart which he had nailed up on the south side of the shack, saying in a rather chauvinistic tone, "For the benefit of out-of-towners, I'd best remark to start off that Chatham has always enjoyed some peculiar advantages in the thieving line. The place is known for it, or was. The population now is made up of milksops and antiques, so the color has mostly gone out."

Bill noticed at this point that Uncle Veenie's face indicated some slight doubt whether the Captain's lecture was taking precisely the right direction to stimulate the skeleton business; however, he made no outcry but resumed his beaming at the customers.

"The reason for the advantage," continued Captain Cobb, "is these bars as you can see marked here on the chart. Now what does that look like?" he asked, placing his pointer and nodding his head at the front row, which unfortunately happened to include the Deane boys, natives.

"Appears to be a nailhead, Ezra," said one of them.

"No, it was a horsefly," said another. "It's flew off."

"Oh, never mind that," said Captain Cobb testily. "You fellows weren't planning to see the skeleton anyhow—you couldn't raise a dime amongst you. No," he went on, "what you're looking at is a reading of six feet—six feet of water at a distance out at sea of two MILES! With luck you might skip over at high tide, but at low tide you'd have trouble in a canoe. Now that's all well and good—any dunce can read a chart and hold offshore—but the trouble was they tried to slice it close to save time and money. The upshot was that Chatham, which juts out in the ocean, being the elbow of the Cape in a manner of speaking, got most of the wrecks. You folks wouldn't believe it to look around—the place is as dead as a mackerel now—but the choicest collection of thieves on earth was formerly concentrated right here in this spot. They called it Scrab-

bletown, a fact that the present bunch would like to have you forget, and for purposes of illustration I'll just pass along an anecdote——"

At this point, Bill saw Mr. Burskin, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, leave in considerable haste, presumably to return to headquarters and report on the holocaust.

Captain Cobb continued with the anecdote, which had to do with the *Nancy M. Foster*, a schooner that went aground in fog on the Shovelful Shoal. A big sea was running, he said, and her seams began to open in about two hours. Whereupon the frightened crew availed itself of articles of buoyancy—"planks, hatch-covers and hen-coops"—and headed posthaste for the beach. "I was standing ashore along with some others," related Captain Cobb, "when the first survivor appeared in the surf. He was riding a trunk lid and making out tolerably well. A minute later he lifted his head and saw the collection of hard-looking customers lined up at the edge. I heard him cry, 'What town is that?' 'Chatham!', somebody yelled back. 'Goodby,' he replied, and the entire crew, officers and hands, turned around and headed back toward the wreck."

Observing the Reverend Elijah Somerset in the audience, Captain Cobb thoughtfully inserted a pair of tributes to preachers of the old Cape, one involving a Wellfleet man who, in the midst of a sermon, looked out of the window and saw the masts of a wreck coming ashore. As quick as a wink, said the Captain, he climbed down from the pulpit, reported to his congregation and, clearing a path in the aisle, cried, "Start fair!"

"Perhaps the sneakiest trick ever played by the Chatham clergy," said Captain Cobb, "occurred when I myself was in the congregation. This fellow—I won't mention names—was dribbling along talking against sin and daring the Devil to come out and fight, when a boy came running in with a note. We afterward learned it was news of *Lie Alfred W. Fiske*. You'd hardly credit it, but the preacher sang out, 'We'll bow our heads in a word of silent prayer.' When we raised up to look, the old humbug was gone. He'd cleared out—harnessed his horse and wagon and snatched up enough cargo to retire on and live in ease. To my knowledge, he never preached another sermon in Chatham."

Captain Cobb gave the figure of 3500 as representing roughly the total number of ships known to have been sunk off the Cape. Chatham and Truro had got the great majority, he said, with Wellfleet capturing an occasional prize. He remarked in particular the pirate ship *Whidaw*, carrying the bloodthirsty Sam Bellamy and a crew of a hundred, that blew ashore there in 1717. "Everybody was drowned except two, a man named Davis and an Indian who'd been pressed into service," he said. "You can see the graves down to Wellfleet today if you've a mind to. Anyhow, Sam Harding happened onto the wreck before anybody, so they say, and together with the Indian he got his barn full of goods before the bulk of the town arrived. By the time the King's agent journeyed down from Boston to claim salvage, there wasn't anything left but the paint."

Captain Cobb paid homage to the hospitality of Chatham folk, who, he said, greeted wrecked crews with more ingenuity than was displayed elsewhere on the Cape. "The citizens put bricks in old stockings," he said, "and hit the crews over the head when they came ashore. That way, they were able to avoid contention over ownership of the goods." As far as he, Cobb, personally was concerned, he stated, the wreck of the steamer *Onondaga*, in 1907, was the most satisfactory on the basis of simple theft. "I was a youngster at the time. She was a big Clyde Liner and she came ashore a little north of where the Chatham Bars Inn now stands; the ocean washed through in those days. Well, sir, the owners contracted with the townspeople to help pile cargo on the beach, so as to save whatever possible in case the ship broke up. Now I'll just list the items to avoid confusion in your minds. There were racing cars, potatoes, blankets, whiskey, mule hay, sheets, pianos, gravestones, candy, several tons of wrapping paper, organs, champagne, coffee, and beer—those were the mainstays. As the operations advanced it would have done your heart good to see the Chatham men going back and forth aboard, eating candy, drinking champagne, and filling their pockets with potatoes. It was a dry day, but they wore mostly oilskins, and they were wonderfully swollen about the midriff as they made little side trips up into the weeds, to deposit radiator caps and keyboards. By nightfall, the only thing left whole was the mule hay and the gravestones. I could name barns here-

abouts that were filled with wrapping paper for upwards of ten years."

In his study of Chatham wrecks, Captain Cobb mentioned a few more by name, such as the *Cottage City*, the *Horatio Hall*, and the *Aransas*, and concluded with the wistful hope that the old conditions might return someday, so that commerce would be stimulated and the people of Chatham would be awakened from their present apathy. "There's good stuff in them, but it's asleep. Eliminate the means to steal and you destroy the will to live," he said in peroration, and he asked them to view the skeleton.

They took in twenty dollars in the next two days, and then trade began to fall off. They reduced the price to five cents for children, causing a little spurt in attendance, but afterward things dwindled again. Captain Cobb then had the inspiration to get one of the local ministers down and conduct a service over the skeleton, as a gesture of humanity and all-around religious good feeling.

"Frankly," he said, "I think it would pull. We could insert an inexpensive notice in the newspaper, in amongst the truss ads and grocery bargains on Wednesday, and I predict that we'd have a fair crowd turn up. The overhead for the preacher oughtn't to run over three or four dollars at the outside."

"It's a Christian thought," said Uncle Veenie, "but I question if we could persuade anybody to take the job on. Preachers have got all-fired soft-headed lately. Only last autumn that new fellow the Episcopalians acquired refused to go down and help pillage a wreck. If a beached craft ain't fair game on Cape Cod, I've lost touch with theology. As you pointed out in the lecture, time was when the preachers would have arrived first at the scene. What's more, they'd have staked it off an' kept out the general public, if they could have managed it without being thrashed."

Captain Cobb nevertheless made a desultory check, and verified Uncle Veenie's gloomy prediction. One man, who had a congregation of thirty-five or forty midway in the scrub between South Chatham and Harwich, offered to come up for expenses and lunch, but he quashed any hope of charging admission. "You can pass the hat," he said, "according to custom in God's house, but as for a flat fee, I'd have to say no. It's entirely without scriptural precedent."

"I wouldn't care to take the risk," Captain Cobb told him. "I know Chatham."

As things turned out, it made little or no difference because the police got onto the skeleton the following day and sent a state trooper down to investigate. He was a pleasant but harassed young man, a member of a Barnstable family that had owned a salt works and a tidal mill in the old days before large-scale commerce destroyed such Cape industries.

"I've checked the missing-persons file, both regional and nationwide," he said when they took him inside the shack. "Nothing strikes my eye as being exactly fitted to this case."

Ezra Cobb's look was disparaging of state troopers and modern police machinery in general. "Does your file carry back to the Revolutionary War? There isn't any date on these bones, not that I can make out. What if it's an Indian; where does ~~that~~ put your file?"

"It's merely a routine check, in an effort to be of assistance."

"Nobody hollered for assistance," said Captain Cobb testily as Uncle Veenie made placating gestures. "There's a concentration of authority in recent years that I don't relish. The authority's been concentrated too much in the police and not enough in the citizen. This skeleton's private property."

"Identification must be established," said the trooper firmly.

"Well, it seems a little hard," said Uncle Veenie. "Here we've gone to all the trouble and expense of digging this fellow out of the sand, set him up in style, with a nice roof over his head, and just when he could turn around and do a little something for us, in busts the police."

"If a vote can change anything, the opposition can depend on mine," said Captain Cobb. "As soon as I find out the name of the Congressman from around here, I aim to serve notice—I'm through."

The trooper knelt down to make a minute inspection, saying, "The usual procedure is to dispatch the remains to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I see the teeth are intact."

"And what if nobody claims him?"

"I imagine he would be returned in time."

Uncle Veenie looked up with a shrewd expression. "Who's re-

sponsible for cratage and transportation? If it's us, he'll go freight. We're in no hurry, and neither is he. My wife wouldn't endorse first- or second-class mail, so you needn't expect it."

The trooper assured them that the government would provide the postage, and they permitted him to make off down the beach with the skeleton. "I'll miss him," said Captain Cobb. "It's like losing a member of your own family. For two cents I'd file charges against that fellow for kidnapping."

Uncle Veenie took a philosophic, almost biblical view. "He may even returneth, like the prodigal son. Leastways it's his hands. All we can do now is play a waiting game."

7 Thursday night Bill took Myra to the Mid-Cape summer theatre. He'd promised to go and she pinned him down, saying, "It's Godfrey Thayer. We met him two winters ago at Dorothy and Dan's."

"The lean and hungry Englishman—the fellow I loaned five dollars so he could get his tuxedo out of heck."

"That was in his Shakespearean phase, his legs were too skinny. He's got this grand part now and wears pants."

"What's the play about?"

"The action takes place in the slack of a coal-mining family near Pittsburgh. I read in a magazine where it was powerful as well as stark. Also written in blank verse."

"Any funny stuff? Comedians, pratfalls, buckets of water, stuff like that?"

"I hardly expect that the poverty-ridden struggles of an immigrant laborer to organize a union shop would be hilarious, but there's no law against laughing if you haven't any better sense."

"You mean they've got Thayer as a foreign-born coal heaver? Whose idea was that?"

ric Steinmetz, the playwright. Seems odd—you'd think he'd know his own play, wouldn't you?"

"Let's get dressed right away," said Bill. "I don't want to miss a single Qxonian guttural."

Before taking a shower, he made two drinks and carried one into her room. She was seated in her slip on a green hassock at her dressing-table mirror, brushing her hair, which tumbled down over her shoulders in a jet cascade. "That's 'quite a mane," he said, carefully placing the glass in a circle of greasy Kleenex. "Blackest damn hair I ever saw. How come? Joan's is brown, and the old gentleman's head, as I remember, was neutral, that is—bald."

"My mother's hair was black. It was beautiful black hair, much shinier even than mine. Father had a touch of Indian blood, and he always said he married her for the hair. It was a joke he made."

"He was certainly a one for joking, was Father. Particularly along toward the end. What was she like?"

"I haven't any idea. My mother was second cousin to the Sphinx. She had been put through a typical Calvinist childhood, filled with flagellation, cathartics, and threats of hell. It disturbed her insides to smile, and a laugh broke her into small pieces."

"What else did she do? How did she make out with the babbling tycoon?"

"Very slightly. Father was a bluff oaf, in spite of his city palace and seventeen servants. He smoked cigars before breakfast and had gold-plated spittoons in most of the downstairs rooms. Every time he spit, my mother rang like a gong."

"This is pretty lively stuff," he said. "Why haven't I heard it before?"

"You never asked me. It's good psychiatric background. Actually, you ought to know all about the parents before preparing your remarks on the daughter. And I'm in a willing mood."

"I wondered about that. How did they fight? What did they fight about?"

"Mother was fearfully stingy, and Father was a perfect fool about money. For example, we maintained a full-time glazier in the conservatory."

"Doing what?"

"Father had a slingshot; he liked to knock out the windowpanes. He had guests in, and they knocked them out together. Not unnaturally, he'd been restrained from that sort of thing in school, and he resented it."

"By the time I knew him he was pretty far gone," said Bill. "When did all the drinking start? And what about that marcelled toupee?"

"Oh, he swilled whiskey almost from birth. But he wasn't a drunkard. I don't believe he ever had a moment's nervousness or self-doubt in his life. He didn't need whiskey; he just drank it, the way people blow horns on New Year's."

"I had the impression he kept a girl somewhere. I probably got it from the toupee."

"Several, I imagine. You see, he married Mother for the sex, and there's no question she was as cold as a tombstone. The children came very late—I always figured it took him that long to talk her around."

"Well, it's an interesting family, but not extraordinary. You move the camera inside the houses, on the real inside, and you get a frightening glimpse of the human beast in his lair. The two faces—the natural and the feigned, a clash that is doubtless the root of all lunacy."

"You'll have to excuse me now," she said. "I'll get along with my toilet. But I hope you'll drop in again. Soon."

"Oh, I'll be back. We're just getting to know each other."

"Not really. Not yet."

At Latham's, a good eating place near Brewster, they ran into the Bensons, who weren't speaking. It was the old trouble. Marge, after a tea at Professor Thorndike's, wanted to discuss literature; Ross, who liked books too well to ruin them with the drive of impostors, withheld co-operation. In response to a worn observation on Tolstoy, he had remarked that, in his opinion, *The Tin Woodman of Oz* was a greater work than *War and Peace*. The reaction exceeded his best expectations, and he buckled down. "It's a symbolic masterpiece," he told her. "The Woodman himself, of course, stands for the machine age, and the ax indicates a hewing away of labor by human agency. As the machines roll on, doubts are raised

in the minds of men, hence the rust in the joints of our protagonist."

Latham's was crowded, as usual, and they stood in the anteroom, waiting for a table. Benson perversely continued his argument, addressing himself to Bill. "You're familiar with *The Tin Woodman of Oz*?"

"You might say I was raised on it. They used to put it on my chair at the table, to prop me up."

"What's your candid opinion of the book in a literary way?"

"A remarkable achievement, a tome that will leave its mark. Already it's established a whole new school of thought, with its influence on younger writers."

"Such as?"

"Faulkner, Steinbeck, Chaucer, Walter Lippmann—fellows of that sort. Whatever Chaucer is today, he owes to *The Tin Woodman of Oz*. Only he's too small to admit it."

"You see?" said Benson to his wife. "These tea-table professors feed you the wrong kind of books." He turned back to Bill. "What do you think of *War and Peace*?"

"War and who?"

"*War and Peace*—big book of over a thousand pages, with hell's own list of names."

"I never heard of it. Published lately?"

"Published a few years ago in Europe."

"How'd it sell?"

"It went very slowly in the trade, but came back strong in the German pocket edition."

It developed that the Bensons, too, were going to the theatre. "Over my protests," he explained. "This is one of those agony numbers—smears, exploitation, pushing around, lynchings, and so on. America the dismal."

"I'm informed that Capitalism takes quite a hiding in the second act," said Bill.

Myra finally began to act annoyed. "Perhaps you can think of something better to do on the maid's night out."

"Say! how'd you like to drive down to Hyannis and shoot some pool?" suggested Benson with an eager look.

"Oh, shut up and let's eat," said his wife. They had a table.

After dinner, the Bensons left in their car, and Bill and Myra followed along slowly in the convertible, its top down. It was an unusually warm night for June. Between Brewster and Dennis the summer music of frogs and cicadas rose above the motor, and the sky was smeared with stars. "I've never seen so many," she said. "It's like a blizzard in outer space. Somebody was going around saying all the funny little things had names."

"No!"

"I heard it only the other day. Scientists get very bossy about stars. What did you think of Marjorie's dress?"

"Was that it? I thought she had on one of her dental uniforms."

"She's terribly green-happy. I should think she might take a whack at yellow or brown, being that color of a blonde."

"Most of the dresses are new. It'd probably be cheaper to dye her hair."

Toward Dennis the traffic became a solid line, and the parking field, when they arrived, was nearly full. There remained only three or four minutes before curtain time, but Bill, climbing out, refused to hurry, observing that, "It's opening night. They're always late. A good deal of the furniture supposed to be loaned them doesn't show up—the people change their minds."

"How you love the theatre."

"Don't I just."

A magnificent cinema, with white covers on the seats, was run in connection with the Playhouse, and he glanced back at the marquee wistfully. "See here, Myra," he said, "over at the movie place they're having one of those Warner Brothers gang fights. Machine guns and face-slapping and big black cars. What do you say? You can read up the play tomorrow and talk about it just as if you'd been there."

She set her mouth in a grim line and said, "I'm going to Autumn Theater; and so, by God, are you. A promise is a promise."

"Maybe the first act and then go to the movie?"

"All or nothing at all."

The Playhouse was, of course, a converted barn, quite warm and stuffy, without noticeable ventilation. The word was that it had

"atmosphere," but an unkind critic, an ambitious young pusher with a summer job and a determination to make phrases at whatever cost, had remarked that, in his view, the barn had substantially the same atmosphere as when it was employed in the interests of agriculture. And indeed there seemed, to Bill, to be always in the air the sweet and soporific perfume of vintage fertilizer, a not incongruous accompaniment to the current entertainments of the structure.

"Smells like horses in here."

"Quit breathing for a while."

The lobby was crowded with laughing, chattering people in summery fluff and sports jackets, with peeling sunburns and heavy jewelry; flushed and congested after cocktails and too much dinner; nervously happy, taxing their hearts, not interested in the play but in each other; women with Mexican pottery make-up, coolly appraising; men watching the jolly breasts and shiny brown calves of the usherettes, wishing the laws of sex were less severe; a representative summer audience, governed by alien checks and balances, the reasoning upper vertebrates hovering just barely over the boundary of civilization.

Bill and Myra were led to their seats by a glowing child whose face was lifted up in dramatic ecstasy. Minutes before, she had talked, in person—briefly to be sure—to the great god Thayer, and now, touched with the fairy's kiss, her spirit soared like a soap bubble, with the buoyancy known only to those for whom a stage is the lodestar of all glamor. What did it matter that Thayer's words were a petulant snarl that the reflector was missing from his dressing-table lights? She suffered the royal rebuke, blushed, dimpled, and skipped deliciously away in search of the manager, her summer filled with magic.

The seats were even more painful than Bill remembered—shallow, bone-hard, bulging where they should have dipped, and set directly behind and slightly below each other, in the American style, presenting the stage in total or partial eclipse, depending on the head in front.

"What do I do with my knees?" he whispered savagely.

"Sort of tuck them up—everybody does."

"Not over in that movie, they don't."

Their seats were near the aisle, and a fairly long procession of late arrivals now began tramping over their feet, in a manner reminiscent of elephants raiding a native village. One woman, sweaty, rustling, commodious, got in, spied an ally four rows down, trumpeted shrilly, and scrambled back out, treading cruelly on Bill's right instep.

"So sorry," she said with an impersonal smile, and he made the ritual response: "Nothing," biting his lip with pain.

The program, which he studied in the half-light, acquiring a mild headache, was given over largely to Thayer, of whom it also included a brilliantly doctored photograph, taken fifteen or twenty years before and showing him dressed in a white turtle-neck sweater and holding a cigarette with languid insolence. In the text his career was traced in some detail: the birth in an old English manor house, the boyhood tutors, Eton, Oxford, not neglecting his rowing Blue, undergraduate theatricals, smashing successes on the London stage, a selfless hitch in the Royal Air Force with a personal commendation from His Majesty, and now New York and the cranberry stint.

At this time, Thayer was, in fact, fifty-six years old but had never quite conquered his distressing habit of lapsing into cockney toward the tail end of cocktail parties. In consequence, he was a cautious drinker. His childhood in Wornwood Scrubbs had been innocent of any luxury, providing him with a certain amount of brassy command, and his self-education, obtained while bundled up to the ears in the British Museum, sufficed to avoid those definitive solecisms so ruinous to the visiting peasantry. Though his war performance had been blameless, his claim of regal applause was farfetched, but not offensively so: he had appeared briefly at Buckingham Palace, together with some others, to recite *Gunga Din* in connection with a benefit.

The curtain was considerably delayed, as Bill had predicted, but the interim was improved, so to speak, by a musical unit that included three violins, a trombone, a trumpet, and a drum, in addition to the standard piano, played by the director's wife. Most of the personnel had been recruited from Mrs. Hockmeister's nearby

Summer Academy and were on rather distant terms with anything more melodically advanced than the C scale. However, drilled to exhaustion, they had gained a certain ascendancy over fragments of Ethelbert Nevin's Venetian Suite, "The Glowworm," Selections from Victor Herbert, and "Humoresque." These they galloped through fairly well grouped, the trombone refusing one or two jumps, and then they started over, but the trumpet got off on "The Glowworm" by mistake, while the violins were picking up with "Sweethearts," and a hell of a mess ensued, as noted the next day by the same critic who had scored so tellingly on atmosphere.

A precipitate ringing up of the curtain delivered the unit from a very pretty dilemma. A setting of hideous squalor was suddenly exposed; the play had begun. It was a scene to wring tears from a totem pole. Thayer's dwelling, a clapboard hut of one room, was nearly barren of furnishings and was decorated in the burlap motif, that is, bits of brown sacking had been fixed over places where windows had been punched out, boards were split, and the like. There were two chairs, one missing a leg, a scuffed-up table, a skimpy iron bed, and some rags thrown into a corner for the children, one of whom was lying there at curtain, coughing. Two others, it developed, were out soliciting the garbage cans of the area, and a fourth was in prison, the victim of a picketing frame-up. Dishes were piled high in a tin sink, over which an incongruously well-formed slattern drooped with tired eyes. Thayer himself was on the bed, dying of silicosis.

"You know," gritted Bill between his teeth, "I was brought up in a coal-mining country, and I never saw anything like this. What's it all about?"

"Shhhh!"

There occurred such a chorus of well-bred hissing from the row ahead that he gave up and slumped down, hoping to catch a little sleep. But it was no use: the discomfort of the seats, the confined air, the clamorous accents of the congregating miners, all combined to keep him at miserable attention.

The shack's heating facilities consisted of a red cardboard fireplace, which fell over with a crash midway during the first act. Despite his long professional training, and notwithstanding the

silicosis, Thayer was sufficiently annoyed to spring out of bed with an un-Etonian oath. Then, recovering his character, he blamed the mishap on the mine owners and crawled back into bed. The plot moved along. By the end of the second act, the situation was briefly this: To implement their plea for a closed shop, the miners had machine-gunned six men who preferred not to belong to the union; two tipples had been smashed in a night raid; and the owners had retaliated by cutting off the miners' credit. Thayer's youngest child, the grimy urchin in rags, had suddenly quit coughing, and was buried the following morning in Potter's Field. His oldest daughter, twelve, discouraged with the fare from the garbage cans, had entered a house of prostitution, and his son in the penitentiary had hanged himself with a pair of stolen suspenders. The reading of the telegram, sent collect by a disgusted warden, was acknowledged to be Thayer's best scene: his pitiful sobs as he swayed in his scrap of a nightgown had handkerchiefs going all over the house. Prior to Scene Three a heavy snow had fallen and Thayer was obliged to crawl outside, in all hours, and scavenge for firewood. Before returning, empty-handed, he was rather badly bitten by a neighbor's dog. Then a corrupted case-aid worker had called, refused help, and threatened to have them all arrested for vagrancy. The curtain was rung down on Mrs. Thayer's memorable line: "My God, I believe I'm pregnant again!"

Bill clawed his way up the aisle and out of doors, gasping for air, as Myra followed in indignation.

"You're the only person in there making a fuss," she said. "I'm really getting fed up, Bill."

The Bensons came out, and Ross said, "I don't see any signs of a break—not yet. I think it'll get worse before it gets any better."

Bill mopped his face and neck, removed his jacket, and hung it over the limb of an adjacent dogwood. "I wonder if we couldn't take a little something for the third act," he said. "Working on the lower levels like that, the dust seems to dry out my throat——"

"It so happens," replied Benson, "that I have a bottle in the car, said to be a specific for Anthracite Hack. If you'll step this way . . ."

"Go on. Go right ahead," said Marjorie. "And sit together when

you get back. I'll stay with Myra."

"Watch out you don't get exploited," Benson told her. He and Bill relaxed during most of the denouement, which saw a convalescent Thayer installed as absolute dictator over two thousand men, and dropped in only a few moments before the end, not bothering to go to their seats.

When Myra and Marjorie came up the aisle, their eyes were shining. "It was wonderful; it was a grand finish," said Marjorie. "Much too good for you birds. I'm glad you weren't here."

"Two acts of Thayer is the average for an adult," said Bill. "I feel that I did my duty, and a bit more."

"Maybe not quite," said Myra. "We're on our way backstage."

"You are."

"We are."

For a moment he stood looking at her; then, seeing the little muscle in her right cheek begin to move, he said easily, "Why, of course, Myra. I want to be at your side in any emotional crisis."

"I see you took care of the dusty throat."

Thayer's dressing-room door was wide open, but a noisy crowd, preponderantly women, effectively blocked off any quick ingress. Benson, however, rising to the emergency, apologetically shouldered his way forward, saying, "If you please, awfully sorry," and "Kindly make way for Mr. Thayer's sick mother." Dragging his wife by the hand and Bill and Myra along in his wake, he pushed through to the inside where, surprisingly enough, there was vastly more room. Myra edged forward, and Thayer, spying her, said, with simple feeling, "Darling," and took both of her hands. His dresser had opened some California champagne, provided by the management (according to contract), and was handing it about with reluctance.

Bill edged up to Thayer's mirror in an effort to read some of the telegrams stuck around the edge. With a single exception they were gushy and hopeful, and were dispatched by such agencies as "Brooks Costume Co.," "Beckman Towers," "Joe's Cutrate Liquor Store," and "Herman the Friendly Chiropractor." One message, impressive in its curt sincerity, was signed merely "Waldo" and said, well within the ten-word limit, "Congratulations for knock-

ing off the Shakespeare."

Bill finally got up close enough to Thayer for Myra to say, "You remember my husband?" Thayer took his hand but continued to look at Myra. "Frankly," he said, with a naughty giggle, "I'd forgotten you were married."

"We met at the Silberbergs'. I loaned you five dollars so you could get your dress suit. I was wondering if you could give it back—I've had a lot of hard luck lately."

"My dear fellow," cried Thayer, looking around at last. "Are you serious? Yes, I believe you are. Good heavens, will you see my agent at once? And now you must excuse me." His half bow included Myra as he turned away to another group.

"Stark, staring crazy!" she said in a voice that shook. Her cheeks were crimson.

Bill caught Benson, who was trying unsuccessfully to reach a glass of champagne. "I'm having a little trouble with this fellow Thayer. He owes me five dollars and refuses to cough up. I wonder if you'd mind bracing him?"

"Not at all," said Benson politely. "See here, Thayer," he cried, taking the actor's arm, "you really ought to come through with that five dollars for my friend Bill. There's no sense in being mean. You wouldn't like it thrown into the Small Claims Court, now would you?"

Thayer's expression was so terrifying that Benson backed off, then whispered in Bill's ear, "I think we'd better cut for it. He's about to toss a tantrum."

"Gone far enough?"

"That's the way I see it."

"Then away." They saluted, calling out felicitations as they left: "Thrilled." "Too wonderful." "Orgasmic." And the like. Thayer stood speechless as they backed out of the door and turned down the hall. A few paces later a formidable blonde with an incoming party stopped Benson and said, "Forgive it, but aren't you Eric Steinmetz?"

Benson grinned boyishly and looked at the floor.

"Oh, go on, Eric," said Bill impatiently. "'Fess up."

"I know I shouldn't stop you," said the woman, "but I've got to

tell you that it was all just absolutely marvelous. We drooled over your lines."

"Oh, they weren't so much," said Benson, manfully trying to recover his poise.

"But they were! Tell me, whatever gave you such a scorching idea?"

"I guess I got it from Dad," said Benson. "You see, Dad was"—his voice broke slightly—"kicked to death by a pit donkey. Two years ago last April."

"How criminally bitchy!" cried the woman. "Didn't you do anything—take action, strike, sue, or some such?"

"No, I just wrote the play."

"You angel! Now I want you to autograph my program, right here, below the shoes. Like a sweet boy."

"I'd be honored, ma'am," said Benson. "You've been—swell. What's your name?"


"Firth. Faith Firth. Mrs. Faith Firth. Isn't that a hell of a nuisance? But I hadn't a thing to do with it, so let's push on to business."

Taking her pen, Benson wrote, "To Faith, in memory of two gorgeous nights at the Snow Inn—Eric." He folded the program and handed it back.

"You're a lamb," she said, patting his cheek. They swept on.

"Well, we've had an evening at the summer theatre," said Bill. "Now to repair the fences."

But they were too late. The girls were gone.

❖  ❖ ❖ ❖ A new moon had risen above the big trees and square old houses of the Bay-side Cape. The untimely heat of an early summer night prolonged the concert of insects, and over the tidal marshes, as they drove toward Orleans, shone a faint,

phosphorescent glow, the death radiance of a million stranded sea things. The water was far receded, rolled back like a biblical barrier, leaving a mile or more of hard sandy shelf imperceptibly sloping.

"I can't get on to this tide over here," said Bill, slouching down with his knees against Benson's dashboard. "I'd never get used to it. Boats in the water one hour and two miles up on dry land the next."

"It's not my side, either," said Benson.

"Got a nice stink, though."

"One of the best—the nice clean rot of shellfish and weed. I've got some others, though: damp barnyards, banana oil, gasoline, furniture polish, witch hazel, fresh-cut hay and clover—"

"Or the wind off a high snow field. I remember once walking a bike over St. Gothard Pass . . ."

"Dry pine needles, and you might include wet puppies, cigars in a humidor, newly sawed cedar, sassafras roots, and cinnamon cooking."

"A fine collection, and speaking of smells I smell trouble—up ahead."

Bill's convertible was pulled off the road beneath some trees, one wheel sunk to the hubcap in ooze and the left front fender crumpled snugly against a fence post.

"They didn't have time to get tanked up," said Benson.

"No, it's Myra, she can't drive. Her head's wrapped in the swirling mists of psychoneurosis. Damn the girl."

They got out and surveyed the damage, which was unserious, and between them managed to remove the car from its bed of slime.

"It'll drive all right," said Benson. "Now where do you suppose they went?"

"Probably down the lane past the Camp, to the Bay. Myra likes to feel a oneness with the earth and the sea on moonlight nights, especially when things like fence posts and her husband have conspired to plague her."

Benson got in his car and, with Bill following, drove down the tarred road toward Camp Monomoy, into the thick scrub pine. The Camp lay off to the right, beneath the trees, asleep, with only

a few dimmed lights—those of the staff and the ones near toilets—the tennis courts naked and shining under the moon, rifle range, basketball and volleyball courts emptied of sound and motion, at rest except in the restless sleep of 120 boys, a community of the imponderable young, doctors, lawyers, beggarmen, thieves—a bright equal place in the waiting time of the successful and the doomed.

"Not here," called Benson, pulling up. "Unless they're playing volleyball off somewhere in the trees."

"On to the water. Up the beach beyond Linger-Longer-by-the-Sea, Myra will be found, pleating a dark red love knot into her coal-black hair."

"They're all unhinged a little," said Benson. "She has no corner on the vapors."

The beached cats of Camp Monomoy, tilted on their sides, masts thrust out in grotesque angles, dotted the unmarked sand, trailing their dry and flimsy anchors.

The sky was still clear. To the right, around the inside curve of the Cape, blinked the firefly cluster of Provincetown, illuminated for summer mischief. And behind them only a night light showed in the darkened front of the hotel, as its patrons slept off the unaccustomed wrenches of the day. It was exactly midnight.

Walking up the beach in the moonlight, Bill thought of the place and of the Brewster men he had known in books: Captain Freeman Mayo, of the *Iris*, who, bound for New Orleans with a cargo of axes and nails, had fought the pirates off Cuba; Captain Isaac Clark, an adventurer of such spirit that he had sailed as early as 1795 to Archangel, where, to unload his cargo, he had to wait six months for the arrival of the first American minister; of young Elijah Cobb, a sailor at thirteen and earning the sailor's wages of \$3.40 a month, who captained a brig at twenty-four and visited Robespierre to complain when it was impounded during the French Revolution; Captain Judah P. Baker, who raced his clipper *Shooting Star* around the Horn to San Francisco in 105 days; Captain William H. Burgess, a veteran at twenty-two, master of the clipper *Whirlwind*, who married and took his bride to sea, only to have her fill her journal with remarks about his swearing; of Cap-

tain Tully Crosby, who rose from cabin boy to master of the famous *Antelope*, which he sailed around the world; of J. Henry Sears, a man of great culture; Freeman Lincoln, the father of Joseph C. Lincoln; Edgar Lincoln, a cousin, who was captured by the confederates in the *Alabama*, and of whom they condescendingly wrote: "He had few of the earmarks of the Yankee skipper about him. He was devoid of the raw-boned angularity which characterizes most of them, and spoke very good English, through his mouth instead of his nose. His pronunciation and grammar were both good—quite an unusual circumstance among his class."

Well, they were mighty men, Bill reflected, and their descendants, in bed now just over the black line of hills, dug clams and sold bait to the city folks. But perhaps they were only biding their time, like the jungle pushed back from Angkor Vat. As the cycle turned, and all other resources were exhausted to feed the game of wars, the wind would still be there and Brewster sailors might possibly return to their trade. It was a faint hope, but nourishing; he felt refreshed treading the unaltered sand of the captains. His thoughts returned to earth when Benson, up ahead, said, "Somebody's out there—way out toward the water."

"Why yes," he replied. "That will be Myra, doing her Cosmic Gyration. In the deepest winter of her discontent she once joined a cult that advised going barefoot and dancing nude in strong moonlight, to absorb what they called 'Stellar Strength.'"

"Well, Marjorie'll fill up on Stellar Strength and catch pneumonia," said Benson irritably. "And Marjorie sick is even less of a bargain than Marjorie well."

"We'd better go out and break it up."

Taking off their shoes and socks, they ventured onto the damp shelf, walking noiselessly around little puddles and tangled piles of kelp toward the shadowy figures a mile away. Crabs and other night hunters scrounged over the flats, and the smell of low tide was strong on the inshore breeze.

Myra, when they approached, was explaining the basic rhythms, the lunar vinculum, that had aided her briefly in a trying period. "I should have kept on," she was saying, her voice coming with startling clarity across the sand. "Kemal Guru said I had mystic com-

munion. *But I didn't have at first.*" Facing her in impressive silhouette, Marjorie said, "I don't feel anything. Not yet. What do you do with your arms again?"

"Stretch them straight up, but don't stand on tiptoes, and stare directly into the face of the moon. Now imagine that you haven't got a body——"

"I hope we're not interrupting anything," said Benson pleasantly.

"Oh, stink! They're here."

"Go get your clothes on, Marjorie. We're on our way home."

"Say, who do you think——"

"Hurry up, before I begin to act like somebody's husband."

"We're always the first to leave. Whenever you see I'm having a good time, it's off for home. You ruin everything."

"You've met Bill here?"

"At least the face is familiar," said Bill.

"Oh!" For the first time, she became aware that she was standing totally bare beneath a chandelier moon, and in response to a lingering atavism, she made the usual semaphores of September Morn.

Benson sliced her sharply behind, and she yelped, jumped, and scrambled away with him in leisurely pursuit.

Bill watched them go, wondering which direction their excitements were apt to take. Then he turned back to Myra, who was standing defiantly, her hands on her handsome hips.

"Well, what about it?" she said. "I'm sick of your things and you're sick of mine. Nothing in the world would excuse your conduct in Godfrey Thayer's dressing room. I was humiliated."

"Where are your clothes? Get yourself dressed. You can have your usual fit tomorrow, at home, where the police aren't likely to interfere."

She slapped his face, hard, and he caught her hand. "Easy now, Myra," he said in an even tone. "Just get dressed, and we'll talk about it on the way back."

Trying to free herself, she began to cry and said, "At least Ross had guts enough to get mad. You and your goddamn tolerance turn my stomach. Let me go."

"Why do you want me to get mad, Myra? How will that help

you?"

"I don't know. LET ME GO!"

He continued to hold her tightly, but refused to raise his voice. "You'll wake up somebody, Myra. Kemal Guru wouldn't want you to get arrested—you'd undo all his good work."

"Shut up that stupid sarcasm. Sarcasm and irony, and that bloody damned second-rate levity—it's all you know, and you know why? You're too much of a weakling to face anything real. TURN ME LOOSE!"

He dropped her arms abruptly and said, "Come home when you like. you spoiled fool. I'm leaving."

"Bill."

He turned around and waited.

"Let's don't go home like this."

"I'll be in the car, Myra. I'll wait half an hour, and then I'm leaving. I'm suddenly all caught up with your idiotic spasms."

"Let's do something to make it up, so we won't go to bed mad and wake up with that awful black shadow. And the pressure, pressing down. I'll be sick, Bill."

"What was it you had in mind?"

She came up and took his arm. "We can drive it away if we do something together, something rough and different and hurting. Kemal Guru calls it an alternative—let's try it, Bill."

"The hell with Kemal Guru. What's the matter with you, Myra?"

"Take off your clothes, Bill, and let's go swimming. Naked and free and cool, the way we used to in Mrs. Whitman's secret cove in Maine, with the big pines all around and only the little pebbly strip of sand to lie on in the sun."

"Oh, bilge."

"You've got to try it, Bill," she said fiercely. "Do it my way just this once. I want us to walk on some clam shells and feel them almost cutting and then the cold water rising inch by inch above our knees . . ."

Moving around to get the moonlight full on her face, he studied her curiously, slightly nettled at being stirred in spite of himself. "No matter what else we might say about you, Myra, nobody can

deny that you'll make a grand case history."

*"Take them off, Bill. Hurry!"

He found a smooth, round pole of driftwood not yet gone soft and thrust it far down into the muck. Then he took off his clothes and hung them on it, to keep them out of the wet.

"I'm a sensational sight in the moonlight. Lead away, Myra."

She took his arm again and said, "That's good, Bill. It's starting to work already."

The water began in fifty yards, lapping softly at the low-tide beach, the bitter edge of its cold gone for a while after the day of premature heat. He felt her shiver, still clinging to his arm, and heard her whisper, "I like the gritty sand out here that sucks at your feet."

"It's damn cold. Hasn't Kemal Guru got something we can play on the sand?"

"Shhh! You'll break the spell. You're feeling it fine—I can see you." She half dragged him out into deeper water, making him put his feet down without exploring the bottom. Then, going on ahead, she splashed beneath the surface and came up swimming, taking long, silent strokes, with her thick black hair streaming over her shoulders. She was a beautiful swimmer; at boarding school, in backstroke sprints, she had come within tenths of the marks that made headlines, and then, as the coaches grew excited, her interest died, and she never really tried hard again. She turned over on her back now, lifting half of her body out with the clean windmill strokes and letting her feet coast in a low-beat flutter.

"Dive under, Bill," she called. "Go deep where it's cold."

Taking a reluctant breath, he propelled himself forward and down, bracing himself for a shock. He meant to come up and give chase, and end all the foolishness. But when he came up she had disappeared.

"All right, Myra. Damn and double blast her. Cut it out."

The tide was beginning to flow; standing on tiptoes, he could feel it straining against his stomach, pushing him toward and down the beach.

"Where are you, Myra?"

It was a predicament he had wondered about often. Struggling

on out into the Bay, to the place where he had seen her last, he waited until he thought her breath was bound to be exhausted, meanwhile searching all around with his feet. Then as disgust gave way to fright, he sank to the bottom and groped over the hurrying sands. But his breath was short and he popped up gasping and called her name several times. Even now he expected her to come sailing out with a pretty porpoise roll and walk up against him in the sure knowledge of her persuasive warmth.

"Come on, Myra," he said in irritation. "Come on, damn it!"

Diving and searching and standing and shouting, he went back and forth over a broad area where she had disappeared. It was useless; she had vanished as completely as the moon that was now sliding into a cloudy turbulence. Suddenly realizing that he needed help, he thrashed his way, partly swimming and partly walking, toward the beach.

The moon being still submerged when he came out, he lost some little time in finding the stake with his clothes. Then they fell off when he touched them. He pulled on only his trousers and gathered up the rest in his hands; then he ran over the flats toward the low night light of Linger-Longer-by-the-Sea. The tide had begun to flow strongly, and there was a quick sea change in the weather. Where before the shelf had been filled with low dry spots, water now ran down in devious rivulets to form pools, into two of which he splashed awkwardly, nearly falling. The squall swept in fast from the bay. Lightning streaked through the rolling cloud bank, and a strong salt wind wrenched at him in sudden unsettling gusts.

When he reached the high-tide beach, the storm boiled up to its climax with cymbal-like crashes of rain, a shocking deluge. Unable to see farther than a few feet, he ran into the hotel wall and smashed his wristwatch and struck his nose and cheek with such violence that the tears sprang to his eyes. For a moment he stood irresolute, his attention unreasonably fixed on shaking out the remaining glass of the watch crystal. Then, by-passing the hotel, which had an appearance of sedentary repose, he pounded on through the rain toward his car and the Camp.

Myra, dressed, was waiting for him. She had the top up and seemed relaxed and interested. At first, unable to speak, he leaned

against the rim of the door and stared through the window at her white face in the intermittent lightning. But when he had grasped completely the fact of her presence, he dropped his clothes, snatched the door open, and yelled above the rain, "What in the hell's the matter with you, you psychotic freak?" He grabbed her shoulders and shook her until her head jumped back and forth like a rag doll's and her hair came down in a damp shower.

"Answer me, damn you!"

"Don't, Bill! Wait a minute." She fell back limply against the opposite door and started to whimper, but he reached across the seat and caught her dress. "Right now, Myra. I want to know why. I thought you were drowned. You are crazy, aren't you?"

"I wanted to see."

"See what?"

"What effect there would be. What reaction."

"On me?"

"Whether everything might be the way it used to. At Mrs. Whitman's cove, for instance."

"By doing this?"

She sat up again. "What did you think? I'd really like to know.

Picking up his clothes, he walked around the car and got in, slammed the door, and turned on the ignition key.

"A night at the summer theatre. Let the curtain fall; the tense little farce is over."

"No, it's only the beginning of summer. I don't believe it."

"Things play out."

"But they needn't. It's only a state of mind, like a bunch of sports writers telling a thirty-five-year-old baseball player he's an antique so often he begins to believe it and quits. But not me, I'm in my beautiful prime."

"You've changed, kid. I haven't seen you in years. Where did you go by the way?"

"Never mind, Bill. Maybe it was nothing you could help."

He started the car. "Let's go home. You'd better bundle up. You'll take cold as usual."

"Look who's talking."

9 At eight in the morning, Joan coasted down the slope from the pines and into the yard on her bicycle. She looked newly scrubbed and had on clean clothes—sandals, yellow shorts, a light blue blouse with the top button thoughtfully swinging free. Around the curve of the drive, rolling at a good clip, she lifted her hands from the handlebars, teetered rhythmically, clapped them back again, and skidded to a reckless stop by standing on the brake pedal. She slid off into the middle well and tossed the bike aside in the grass.

Except for Alice in the kitchen, no signs of life downstairs. She went around the outside to Bill's window, selected a few smooth stones, took a pitcher's bead, and lofted the first one neatly through the glass. At the melodic tinkle of falling splinters, he got up and banged the window the rest of the way to the top.

"What's the big idea?"

"I'm sorry, Bill. I only meant to hit the sill and get you started up."

"The window comes out of your allowance, and I'm not interested in getting up. We turned in late."

"Yes, I heard," she said. "I got the general idea. But you'd better come on down—things have hotted up nicely at Uncle Vecnie's shack."

He looked interested at last, and she pursued her advantage. "Seems the dicks——"

"Police."

"Seems the police have got back a quick flash on the Phantom of Morris Island."

"The skeleton?"

"Even so. You're coming along fine, Bill. The FBI had a grand chart of his mouth—bridgework, cavities, culverts, and the like.

Which reminds me, if I ever decide to do murder I certainly intend to take along a forceps and remove the teeth."

"Get on with it. What about the skeleton?"

"They're standing by for the full report. And that's why the pebble and the window—they want you on hand in an advisory capacity. They say you're a part owner, like me."

"I'll be down."

He climbed into his clothes, shaved, and tiptoed past Myra's room, pausing to look in briefly. Her door had been left partly open; it remained at the same angle. She was sleeping on her face, her black hair spread out over the pillow. Beside her bed, on the little night table, stood the inevitable bottle of barbiturates, the modern ladies' aid—a latter-day substitute for the revivifying carbonate of ammonium. The feminine fashion changes, he thought. One generation carries a specific to keep awake; the next is concerned with how to stay asleep. For a moment he was tempted to remove the bottle and shake the pills down the drain, but she had a refillable prescription and would simply get more before night-fall.

On down the stairs and into the kitchen. Alice, at the stove, glanced up in a discerning way, said good morning, and poured him a cup of coffee. "I imagine you'll be wanting just the coffee and juice," she observed. Though basically lovable, she belonged to a religious sect of ferocious purity and seldom missed an opportunity to establish her awareness of sin in others. And like many once careless women whose charms had faded while their mates remained robust, she had turned to religion to bridge over an uneasy gap. She held possible infidelity up to her husband like a reproachful mirror, and he, with no thoughts of philandering, continued to be punished for merely being healthy. Alice also had a stomach complaint that excluded alcohol. In consequence, missing it keenly, she was more down on drinking than the frostiest lifelong teetotaler.

"Well, now, what gave you that idea?" said Bill, used to it all, like a well-remembered rite. "On the contrary, I'd like three scrambled eggs, toast, and bacon, and I want it in the dining room—not in the kitchen."

Joan came in, slamming the door noisily, and sat down for a second on a stool. "Fix me some coffee, will you, Allie? Two sugars, inxay on the cream."

"Yes, of course, Miss Joan. Right away," said Alice with deep sarcasm. "I certainly will, and be snatched baldheaded when the madam gets down."

"Oh, piffle. I swill it by the bucketful at school. I'm known for it. They bring people over from other schools to watch."

"I happen to know that you don't. I read in the catalogue where you never get it unless your parents say so specifically, in a letter."

"Letters can be forged, my friend," said Joan airily. She and Bill moved to the dining room, and Alice brought in a tray.

"You're looking a little whacked this morning, Allie," said Bill. "Got a hangover?"

"Indeed not! Non-medicinal alcohol has never passed these lips. Drink is the devil's tool."

"You're the devil's tool yourself, you and that bunch of witch-burners. What do you do down in that barn?"

"We hold communion with the Lord, and you can joke all you please, but I dread to think where I'd be today if it weren't for the Holy Order of Sanctified Apostles."

"You'd be President," said Bill with emphasis. "They've held you back all along the line. If I were you, I'd get out before it's too late."

"Where's Walter?" asked Joan suspiciously.

"Exactly where I sent him," she answered, bridling. "Down at the paint store getting a can of flat wall white."

"Very likely," said Bill. "If ever I saw a lad with the makings of a Grade A rip, it's our Walter. I notice he's been scenting up his hair."

"He's using Dr. Hoeffe's Formula 17, to ease dandruff. Will there be anything else, Mr. Willis?"

"Not a thing," he said in a kindly tone. "If there's anything, I can get it myself. You go lie down awhile, Alice."

Before leaving, she said to Joan, "Your sister told me to be sure you kept all the buttons buttoned on your blouse."

"Now, how did that come undone?" cried Joan in surprise. Alice sniffed and withdrew.

Driving down to the shack, along the high shore road, they could see the white line of surf tumbled up on the outer beach. The squalls had been general from Maine to Long Island. In the early morning Bill had been awakened momentarily by the dull and continuous thunder from across the Bay. Now the sun was shining again and all was serene, discounting a still fresh breeze. They parked at the foot of Andrew Harding's Lane, waved to George Gould and Wesley Eldredge, and plodded on down to the shack. Besides Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb, the cheery blue morning had brought out other loungers, natives and visitors, who either sat in the sun on the beach or inspected the boats that sprawled everywhere along the beach.

Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb were talking earnestly to the same young trooper who had removed the skeleton before. They expressed delight and considerable relief at seeing Bill and Joan.

"Good morning," said the trooper, looking harassed and indecisive. "I've been trying to explain the situation."

"Now that we've got representation," said Uncle Veenie, "let things proceed according to law. In any case of salvage rights on a derelict corpse it's best to——"

"See here," said the trooper testily, "I'm not a court of law. I'm simply trying to give you the full identification report."

"Then give it," cried Captain Cobb. "I've never come across a Barnstable man yet that would walk straight out with a statement. First, he's got to hem and haw and be sure there's no liability attached. It's like those road signs that condemn it first in case you bust your neck and try to sue."

Slightly flushed and reading distinctly from his notebook, the trooper informed them that the deceased was one Albert Throgmorton, 39, of New Bedford, who had been wanted for two years by both the local and federal police in connection with the abstraction of funds from postal envelopes. Means of death was unknown, said the trooper, but it was conjectured that, after lying low, he had tried to make his way to Nantucket in a catboat and had met with misfortune. Such a boat had been reported adrift

or stolen in that period.

"I was standing here enjoying the salt air whilst you read," said Uncle Veenie, "and it may be I was asleep when you sluffed over that part about the reward."

"I'm getting to it," said the trooper.

"Then get," said Captain Cobb, who appeared to be in a punctual mood.

"A reward of \$500 was posted for information leading to the whereabouts of the deceased."

"Dead or alive?" inquired Uncle Veenie with a sharp look.

"Those 'dead or alive' clauses went out of rewards about the time of the Wells Fargo Express."

"Did it say 'for information leading to arrest and conviction of,' or words to that effect?" asked Bill.

The trooper shrugged. "All I've got here is 'whereabouts.' That part isn't in my province, in any case. If you asked my opinion, though, I'd say they had a pretty good chance to collect."

"So would I," agreed Bill.

Uncle Veenie slapped his knee in triumph. "That settles it! I anticipated a fortune would materialize this summer—all the signs pointed to it, the same as they do in a good flower season. Now I mean to go down to Harwichport and buy that cruiser I've had my eye on. She's a little beauty and ready to go, only the owner's been laid up with jaundice for the better part of a year."

"What about waiting till you collect the money?" asked Joan.

"It's gilt-edged. They can't deprive us of the reward—we'll have \$125 apiece, and this fellow will take a down payment subject to recovery of the boat. He acknowledged as much less than a week ago."

"The money's yours and Ezra's," said Bill. "We waive our rights."

"Hey, you—!" began Joan, but he interrupted with, "Just stick to your allowance, and stay out of trouble."

"I was planning to get a .22 rifle and an evening dress, but let it ride. Nobody gives a damn whether I live or die."

"I'll tell you what you will get," said Bill briskly, "you'll get your mouth washed out with soap."

"Phooey."

Captain Cobb, after a little inward struggle that was reflected in some extraordinary grimaces, insisted that they "share and share alike," and Uncle Veenie suggested that the girl's fourth be set up at the bank as a trust, to be handed over with accrued interest, when she was twenty-one.

"Nope," said Bill. "Two ways. And now, how'd you like to go to Harwichport? We'll have a look at the boat."

Waking up one of the villagers who sat asleep on his bench, Uncle Veenie asked him to mind the business, and they started for the car.

Both of Captain Cobb's dories were rented for the day. On the ride down, lighting a frazzled cigar, he launched into a discussion of possible investments, touching on "debentures" and something he called "A.T. & C.," and was altogether waxing so professional and grandiloquent that Uncle Veenie could stand it no longer.

"Why, Ezra, I'd-a swore you meant to expend your capital at the race track this summer. Howsumever, if you're opening a brokerage concern, I'll be around to throw you my custom."

Detaching his cigar with a look of peeve, Captain Cobb replied, "An investor, a prudent investor, aims to keep a diversified list. It's a matter of percentages. Horses may get some, but they won't collar it all. Anyway," he went on with increased asperity, "I won't be addleheaded enough to sink it in boats. They're the poorest risk that ever was. No matter how you work it, you're only one sandbar removed from pauperhood."

To change the subject, Bill made a soothing comment about the inferiority of Harwich waterways, and they dropped the financial wrangle to combine in agreeable denunciation, treating both the town and its people with spacious contempt. It occurred to Bill that he had never heard a resident of any Cape Cod community say anything genial about any other Cape Cod community, a prejudice that he imagined went back to the days of competitive wrecking. The impartial sea, casting up its prizes, was apt to deliver a choice cargo midway between towns, and the confiscatory byplay, he had read, could stand as a model for beach violence. As early as 1690, for instance, the Provincetowners and Truro-ites

had a memorable engagement over the British man-of-war *Somerset*, which had struck on the Peaked Hill Bar when chasing an impudent Frenchman. The populations of both towns, accustomed to little resistance from the usual water-soaked crews of a dozen or two, were nettled to see an armed complement of five hundred come ashore in excellent condition. The logical step was to summon the militia from Boston; then, when the crew was safely apprehended, the natives went to work on the cargo. It was a rich haul. While the Truro contingent was first on the ground, the delegation from Provincetown overcame its tardiness by an uncommonly skillful attack with cranberry scoops. At length, sensing that nobody was apt to come away with anything more valuable than a broken skull, the two factions struck a compromise, as described briefly in an old letter of General Joseph Otis of Barnstable:

From all that I can learn there is wicked work at the wreck—riotous doings. The Truro and Provincetown men made a division of the clothing. . . . Truro took two-thirds, and Provincetown one-third. There is a very plundering gang that way.

Uncle Veenie spoke with disdain of the former shipping practice of "cornercracking," which he said began with Harwich captains. "You couldn't hardly call it blue-water sailing at all. No, it was a kind of piddling coastal venture that brought down the tone of the entire Cape." Nearly everybody owned a boat of some kind, he said—carpenters, farmers, plumbers and mill hands alike. And when their prosaic callings began to chafe, they loaded up with corn, codfish, and salt and went beating up and down from Maine to Connecticut, swapping for anything salable—buttons, ribbon, pocket combs, yard goods, hardware. Their cargo exchanged, and the fit of ennui spent, home they came, ready to pick up the hammer, the plow, the pipe wrench, or whatever they followed between cornercracks.

"Beyond doubt the harbor down here will be cramped as always," observed Captain Cobb morosely. "I recollect a case where a fellow had to sneeze and knocked over three skimmers. Another time a hand emptied some slops off a yard and ruined the dress

of a woman moored next door in a Chris-Craft. Only thing good about it is you don't need a tender—you can walk ashore on the decks."

Privately, Bill thought the harbor among the prettiest in the world, of a piece with the ones at Villefranche and Monte Carlo. As they passed, turning into the driveway of the Snow Inn, the picturesque little basin was busily receiving its tenants for the summer. At several points, boys in dinghies were putting down moorings, and at the boatyard, across the way, newly painted craft were waiting in the cradles for their regular spring baptismal. Uncle Veenie's agent, acting for the owner of the Bertha T., was found on the dock that ran the length of the narrow and rock-bound inlet. He had been scalloping, on the sly, and had just returned from an incurious seafood café.

"Good morning, good morning, Brother Whitmore!" sang out Uncle Veenie with his customary bonhomie. The man jumped as if seized by the shellfish warden.

"We've come to take another look at the boat."

Mr. Whitmore's face indicated a strong and rather sour belief that a look would be as far as Uncle Veenie could go in the transaction. Nevertheless, he jerked a thumb toward the basin and said, "Well, there she sits, exactly where she sat before, and with nothing to hinder anybody from looking, unless a tempest springs up out of a clear sky, which ain't likely."

At this effusive welcome, Uncle Veenie expressed the most cordial pleasure, and he thereupon led the way down the dock and toward a dinghy at the edge of the harbor. Mr. Whitmore grudgingly followed, while going through an elaborate pantomime to suggest that it was coincidental, that he had business in that quarter anyhow—peering across the water, glancing at his watch, and shaking his head in annoyance as if some valued client had turned up missing.

Interested in the local system of barter, Bill kept slightly apart, so as to study the negotiating parties. In view of Whitmore's extreme bad humor, he thought Uncle Veenie's buoyancy an important commentary on one of the really great dispositions of history, but he noted an abrupt change only a moment later.

As Uncle Veenie came within unobstructed sight of the boat, he stiffened and stopped, taking on an expression of both amazement and torment.

"What's that?" he demanded, stricken.

"How do you mean, what's that?" asked Mr. Whitmore crossly.

"That boat out yonder—what went with the other one?"

"This here's the *Bertha T.* as I calculate you can see on the stern. Leastways you ain't blind."

Captain Cobb, lifting his sunglasses for a clearer appraisal, endeavored to resolve the confusion by remarking that, "She's been rammed and sunk, and raised back up again."

He and Uncle Veenie swung around precipitately and gave every intention of walking back to the car.

"Here, hold on!" cried Mr. Whitmore. "What's the matter with you fellers? You know perfectly well this is the identical same boat."

Uncle Veenie shook his head and smiled sadly. "Then she's gone pretty far downhill since the last I saw her."

"Why, that was less than two weeks ago!"

"Likely a rock," said Captain Cobb. "And it's no surprise to me. This isn't a harbor at all, properly speaking. It's a birdbath. Whereabouts did you hit?" he asked Whitmore, somewhat more pleasantly.

"Hit my foot! That boat's as sound as a dollar, and what's more, you know it. You can take it or leave it alone."

"It won't do any harm to look," said Uncle Veenie sportingly, as if trying to humor him. He climbed into the dinghy and rowed off toward the mooring, though calling as he left, "Still, I greatly preferred the original craft."

During the time it took him to get the boat, put it off its mooring, and tow it back, Captain Cobb diplomatically related an anecdote about an occasion on which he himself had saddlebagged a sailboat on a piece of submerged wreckage and then fixed it up and pawned it off as new. "It was, too, practically," he confided to the agent. "It's a constant wonder what bright paint will do to something that would normally be cast aside as junk." Despite this fraternal discourse, Mr. Whitmore seemed unappeased.

When the bigger boat touched bottom, Captain Cobb took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his trousers, and waded out. Uncle Veenie brought in the dinghy and joined him. Both appeared elaborately dubious, and were giving way to small fits of chuckling and head-wagging. Bill was unable to see anything comical about the *Bertha T.* She was an unglamorous but sturdy 22-footer with a shelter cabin, a commodious cockpit, and a rather rusty Model A engine for power. If she had a serious fault, it was one of age. By no standards could she be called a new or even a modern boat. She had, in fact, been constructed, of Nova Scotia cedar, upwards of thirty years before, and was so heavy that nothing short of an atomic blast could have propelled her out of a trot. Nevertheless, the *Bertha T.* was emphatically afloat and would probably remain so when most of the current plywood wonders had gone to their sandy reward.

With a theatrical flourish, Uncle Veenie now produced a pocket-knife, opened its small blade, and plunged it into the hull. The effect was remarkable: both he and Captain Cobb howled in agony. "This craft's rotted soft from knees to keelson," cried Uncle Veenie. "I hesitate to guess what keeps her above water."

"Nova Scotia cedar don't rot!" stated Mr. Whitmore.

"Call it Nova Scotia cedar?" inquired Uncle Veenie.

"Warranted Nova Scotia cedar."

"Rotting aside," said Uncle Veenie, "I could be interested in this boat only I don't know anybody on the Eastern seaboard that's got facilities to haul it. How much does she weigh?"

"At a rough estimate," ventured Captain Cobb, leaning on one gunwale and putting it down imperceptibly, "three pounds more than the Brooklyn Bridge."

"She ain't no feather," agreed Mr. Whitmore. "This craft was built for a scaway. If you're searching for a picnic boat, I can't suit you."

"What did you say was the asking price?"

"Principal has allowed that he would accept \$600, taking into consideration his jaundice and the fact that the boat's seen service."

Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb scrambled abruptly out of the water and made off up the bank toward the dock, glancing back

over their shoulders and muttering. They seemed in a hurry, and as much outraged as frightened, but their object was clearly to vacate the premises before something more horrifying occurred.

"Hang on, now," cried Mr. Whitmore. "You said asking price. Principal might consent to an adjustment on the basis of cash in hand, granted the rebuttal were proper and fitting."

"Cash!" said Uncle Veenie, aghast.

"Well, you didn't expect to make payment in cordwood and onions, did you?"

"We wouldn't travel in Harwich with cash," said Captain Cobb. "We're not out of our heads, not yet."

"Exactly what did you have in mind concerning this boat?" demanded Mr. Whitmore, not unreasonably, in Bill's opinion.

Whereupon Uncle Veenie, after a withdrawn conference with Captain Cobb, and one quick sprint over to whisper briefly in Bill's ear (presumably an empty gesture, since nothing in the message was identifiable but the words "two and a half buckets of quahaugs") stepped forward and came up with a counteroffer of \$75, to be paid over a period of five years, the annual carrying charge not to exceed two per centum.

It was Whitmore's turn to depart. Jamming his hat down on his head and gritting his teeth with a noise reminiscent of a mortar and pestle, he took to his heels in the direction of the Snow Inn, making excellent time in view of the steepness of the grade.

Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb overhauled him within thirty yards, and the business of serious bargaining got under way. Altogether, it took an hour and a half. In detail, the conference produced the following results: final price of the boat—\$435.80, which included six and a half gallons of gasoline, two seat cushions, a hundred-foot length of anchor rope, and a partial roll of toilet paper in the head. Classed as extras, for which a lump price of \$13.25 was fixed, were a spare anchor, a drinking glass, a foghorn, a hand bilge pump, a kit of tools, four spark plugs, and a leaden life preserver bearing the name S.S. Veendam.

Uncle Veenie signed a note for the down payment, subject to getting the reward, and Bill volunteered himself as security. When the papers were drawn up, everybody shook hands around. Both

sides appeared satisfied, not to say convinced that a virtual felony had been practiced on the opposition. Uncle Veenie, in particular, was well pleased, with special attention to the gasoline. "Nine chances out of ten they class it as extra," he said. "I'll own up I'm content. This may be the first time on record a Harwichporter's been skinned in a trade. It gives me a nice feeling to think it was Chatham as done it."

So saying, he climbed into his new boat and started up the engine. Leaving the car to be picked up later, they prepared to take to the open sea.

At anything but dead low tide, the Sound off Chatham is navigable almost everywhere for small boats, though channels wander here and there, marked by the usual Coast Guard buoys. Hazards are few; a line of rocks alongshore, and an annoying spiderweb of weirs. See it as you please, it was water dear and familiar to Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb. Their seventy-odd years had been spent beating it up for treasure, the hook of Morris Island forming a catchall for floating prizes on the frequent south and southwest winds. And in the old days, during Prohibition, it was the best fishing ground in America. The two enjoyed telling about the happy outings, with the special rods and reels, grapples attached, and the triumphal returns with contraband. The rumrunners from Canada, breaking through the line of revenue boats, would sprint for the quiet Sound, and, if pursued, unload in shallow water, then proceed unconcerned, without risk of incrimination.

"It was about in here, as I recollect," said Uncle Veenie at one point, after they had passed North Harwich, "that we ran into an uncommon school in August of 1924. Me and my brother and the Brashear boys and Otis Quigley, in the latter's boat. I was

high-line that month, with nine cases of Scotch whisky, three of champagne, and several sackings of cordials, liqueurs, and such."

Captain Cobb agreed that it had been lively and worth-while sport. "It's surprising on light tackle how much action you can get out of a twelve-bottle case of spirits. And later on, when the runners commenced to fret about pilfering, they took to busting up the cases and dumping the bottles out singly, and that refined things, of course."

"Otis Quigley fashioned a champion rig for solitaires," said Uncle Veenie. "He was a great hand to cast out and drag over the bottom. It was downright comical to see how distracted he got when a stray flounder looked onto the line. You'd-a thought the fish hadn't any business in the water at all."

"What did you do with the stuff?" Bill asked.

Uncle Veenie looked around in surprise. "We hastily got rid of it. Possession of spirits was contrary to the law. I wouldn't kept it around for anything. No, I telephoned my sunnier boat clients, in Boston, and they came right down and carted it away. They were glad to help out, and I was satisfied to get it off my hands."

"Well, latching onto all that high grade foreign booze, I hope they expressed their appreciation now and then," said Joan.

"I've always enjoyed a pleasurable association with my boat clients," answered Uncle Veenie proudly.

The *Bertha T.* was making good weather of it in a light swell. She was one of those boats lacking a feeling of buoyancy which nevertheless adapt themselves to the most harebrained commotion. Let there develop a cross-chop in a wind-against-the-tide, a quartering sea, rollers bow-on, or a following sea of swamping proportions, and she would lift her nose for a general appraisal, sniff the breeze, and appear to settle down with the confidence of a mother hen tucking in a brood. These were her good points, together with an air of capacious relaxation. On the other side, her power plant breathed intimations of disaster. It had a chronic knock that kept the bolts jumping in the block and seemed to promise that the connecting rods would soon climb out of the enginehead and into the public view. Moreover, the *Bertha's* weight gave her an unalterable gait and made her sluggish to the helm. At the sight

of a floating log,* say, and a quick wrench of the wheel, she would respond with a delayed start, as if wakened from a nap.

"She's a mite hard of hearing," explained Uncle Veenie. "It's best to call her plenty of time beforehand, so the news will soak in."

Even so, the day was bright, the turmoil of the squalls went unfelt in the sheltered Sound, and nobody was in a hurry, nor had any place to go. In Uncle Veenie's phrase, explaining his reluctance to carry a watch, "What's time to á hog?" It was a useful piece of philosophy; Bill hoped to adopt it as a credo. So lulling was this motion, and so cheerful the moment, that Captain Cobb suggested they slip around Monomoy Point, into the ocean, "to stretch her legs in a seaway." Uncle Veenie being enthusiastic, they pointed to the east and ran down the coast of Morris Island.

Monomoy Point is historically one of the most vexatious places on earth for shipping. At any junction of waters, treacherous currents swirl and clash, and this lugubrious landmark, a narrow spatula of sarp¹ formless, impermanent, subject to violent buffetings, released the North Atlantic at the throat of the Sound, with spectacular results. Shifting shoals, rip tides, gusty winds, even a submerged cedar forest, known as "the Stump Ground," made it a region of horror for captains, a name that meant disaster a dozen times over. It was said that if one shoal failed to get you, the next would not shirk its responsibility. A brisk rivalry existed amongst them, with the score rather evenly divided over the long run. In any case, there had been wrecks enough for all.

On the quiet days, the Point was deceptively pleasant, its sands fine-ground and golden, its waters polychromatic and various—ruffled at this spot, glassy at that, and having limitless horizons, because of the meeting-place haze. With the squall effects largely subsided, today was middling calm. Rounding the Point, the *Bertha* bobbed and twisted for a hundred yards and began a sinuous career through the low sea-troughs. And then, five minutes offshore, as they looked toward Nantucket Island, Joan, sprawled full length on the forward deck, cried, "Hey! Something big and black floating directly ahead in the water!"

Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb scrambled out of the shelter for a better look, and yelled simultaneously, "WHALE!" The

Bertha T., all rudder tension gone, wallowed easily in a long hollow only to be whipped about with a crack by a suddenly perverse current. Bill toppled overboard in a second—lifted out of the cockpit as if plucked by some sea giant's hand. He went into the water head foremost, without a splash, tilted on one side. When he came up, he shook his head and looked around to make free of the blade, but it was already a cable length distant.

"Hey, you in the boat!" he shouted, and was relieved to see signs of consternation. Though only a few hundred yards from the Point, he was in a strong tide-run and discarded the idea of swimming back toward the Sound. Moreover the ocean was icy.

They returned, circling around, and he saw Captain Cobb's arm go up and heard a plop in the water nearby. Reaching out, he picked up the S.S. Veendam, which had begun to sink, and felt himself being towed toward the boat. Uncle Veenie cut off the power. Bill clambered up and was pulled over the rail, after which he jumped up and down, getting warm and flinging off the water.

Uncle Veenie seemed chagrined. "Billy, my boy, I'm mortified about that wetting. I lifted my hand for just a jiffy, to blow my nose, like, and she encountered a little whirly spout."

"Why, confound it, you were out on the deck beside me," said Captain Cobb. "We didn't have any more steerage on than a patch of derelict kelp. You've ruind his wristwatch."

"It's waterproof," said Bill. "No damage."

"Well, what about this whale?" cried Joan from the forward deck. "Never mind his clothes. They're antiques, and besides, he can always buy more. Let's get on the ball before this thing wakes up and remembers an appointment in San Diego."

Uncle Veenie started the motor and they bounced on toward the ghostly horizon. Bill raised the question whether the creature might be a blackfish, the smaller sea-dwelling mammal that's second cousin to the whale and seen often in profusion off Cape Cod.

"No, she's a whale, all right," replied Uncle Veenie, as they drew nearer the oily black sides. "I'm not counted an expert, but I can tell a whale from a blackfish. And I think she's expired, else she wouldn't stay breached for such a period. I hope so anyways."

"Why's that?" asked Bill.

"For the ambergris. She'll be a rich haul if she's been sick and spewed up a portion of ambergris. You don't find it in a husky whale, you see. No, frankly, I expect to realize a fortune from this discovery. I can't recall such a year since the old *Asia* split on the Great Round Shoal and discharged a cargo of hemp waist-deep from Monomoy to Inward Point."

The mass was still about a mile distant, huge, shiny, rising and falling with the waves but sufficiently large never to be out of sight. Captain Cobb, excited, remembered that a big finback was washed ashore on the Point in 1933. He rambled on reminiscently, his face transported by hope and avarice, while the *Bertha T.*, now banging up spray in a moderate sea, moved farther from land into the rough Atlantic.

It was recalled that a relative of Captain Cobb's, living near Barnstable, had once been a mainstay in the now vanished industry of "shore whaling": "a hairy sort of man that wore tattooing instead of underdrawers, on the order of a Fee Gee." The prime place for whales was Cape Cod Bay, said Captain Cobb. In the springtime the waters were jumping with scores, large, small, and intermediate. Only a few years back, a white whale, white as snow, played over the surface while hundreds watched from the beach. It was a sight, thought Bill, that might have proved a torment to Captain Ahab, through whose nightmare fancies the great white whale had flashed with such elusive malice. But Ahab was a Nantucket man: that's how they say it, "Nantucket man." Stubb was a Cape Codder. Starbuck and Daggoo came from Nantucket, and Flask and Tashtego from Martha's Vineyard. But that was deep-water whaling, voyages sometimes of two or three years, and toward the end very little to ward off the scurvy, neither greens nor lemon juice nor lime.

Near Barnstable, continued Captain Cobb, they had a big and bustling try-yard, on a cove where the whales were towed and then transported by tackles to the ovens that boiled the blubber that gave the oil that made the lamps burn. It was a simple occupation, but risky. Anybody could follow it. All that was needed was to keep a sharp lookout from shore, spot your whale, jump

into small boats, then chase it down and kill it. Nothing elaborate or expensive required. True, the whale frequently demurred, its protests taking the form of refusing to die, smashing boats, and drowning honest sailors. But it was a lucrative trade, with sunshine and salt air and plenty of room at the top for anybody ambitious to succeed. "My great-uncle, the museum piece I mentioned, was doing well, better than he'd ever done by voyaging, but he got a harpoon line knotted around his foot and accompanied a whale off in the direction of Nova Scotia. It would be interesting to know what came of him. The iron was sunk in deep, and the rope had a small cable core. Like as not that whale's still in business, with Uncle Jeb trailing along behind. They live to a great age, some say—whales, that is."

It was a fine life while it lasted, but petroleum spoiled it all. "The try-yard closed down," said Captain Cobb, "and the weeds grew up and the sand blew over and the years passed by and everybody had forgot where it was. And then, you know, only a short time back, someone stumbled across a rib the size of a canoe—a summer hiker, likely—and they uncovered acre upon acre of skeletons, bleached white bones sticking up every which way, like a petrified forest. A regular whale's graveyard."

"I recollect it well," said Uncle Veenie. "But there's still a lively market for the right kind of sperm oil. And the perfumery people never fail to buy ambergris—a thousand dollars for a lump the size of your fist. I anticipate you'll be surprised how this venture pays out—look alive, now, and we'll come up easy."

Approaching the mountainous black object now wallowing heavily, they became aware of a faint, sweet burden on the inshore breeze, a presence that carried an uneasy warning. Bill puzzled it out as Uncle Veenie maneuvered the *Bertha* closer, alerted for a wheel-and-dash should the whale show signs of animation. It was the first harmless breath of putrefaction, with a signal to the senses of the ripe and suffocating stench to follow. "This boy's dead, all right," he said. "Maybe we'd better veer off."

"He's dead, but not worisome dead," said Captain Cobb. "There are different degrees of dead, same as there are of alive. A good many people now walking around would be better off buried, and

I know several tenants in the churchyard that ought to be evicted—their mischief continues after them.”

“Expired dead,” agreed Uncle Veenie, only slightly dampened. “All the more profit in ambergris. The chances are he had a lingering illness and worked up enough to put us all on easy street. Hold on—I’ll give him a nudge.”

The *Bertha* pressed her stem into the whale’s side and caused a rubbery indentation but there was no movement of the creature through the water. “We’d best put a towline around his tail,” said Uncle Veenie. “We’ll have to steer him inside the Point, to break out of the current.”

After three attempts to fix a rope around the fanlike horizontal flukes, all but losing Captain Cobb over the side, Bill slipped into the water again and made it fast by diving underneath. He climbed back into the cockpit and stood shivering, covered with goose-flesh. “Let the sun beat down,” he said. “Water’s about three degrees above freezing.”

“They say it gets raw after a stir-up blow,” said Captain Cobb sympathetically. “I’ve never been in it myself, though I splashed about in ponds several times when I was a boy.”

Under way, they found that the whale made a slow tow. It refused to be drawn back directly toward the Point, against the tide, but was warped around a wide quartering curve that brought them into the Sound and toward land near the Common Flats. Twice as they knocked along, a biplane circled low overhead, quite obviously interested, then made off in a beeline toward Orleans.

“It’s that nosy Coast Guard,” said Captain Cobb. “If they can’t get at you in the water, they come at you through the air. Next thing you know they’ll buy a submarine so as to spy both aloft and alow.”

“Let ‘em spy,” said Uncle Veenie. “If there’s a law against whaling, I never heard of it.”

In half an hour’s time they were close enough in to see the beach with its grass and drift and rills in detail. Uncle Veenie said, “The tide’s starting to ebb. We can deposit the catch on the Flats and have plenty of room to work in. Burn me, though, if I didn’t wish we had a blubber hook. It would come in handy for the flensing.”

Bill was unable to resist asking, "Honor bright now, Uncle Veenie, do you really know how to strip down a whale?"

"I've heerd it talked about since I couldn't no more than crawl over the sand like a hermit crab."

"Can you do it?"

"I wouldn't want to come right out and say I could. I think I could."

"What's a blubber hook? How do you flense?"

Uncle Veenie turned to Captain Cobb. "Billy, here, wants to know what is a blubber hook." Captain Cobb only looked inscrutable.

"Well, what is it?" asked Bill.

"It's a hook. You take it and you hook off the blubber."

"Where's the sperm oil? How do you get at it?"

"I used to know," said Uncle Veenie with confidence, "and I'll find out again when we get her beached. Meanwhile, you just leave things to me, and don't go worrying your head about blubber hooks and sperm oil. Need be, we'll tap him here and there till we find out—then we'll cork up the sperm oil. Now does that satisfy you?"

"She's touched!" sang out Captain Cobb, and Uncle Veenie switched off the engine.

"Cut her loose. We'll have to wade the boat out and keep anchoring it off, else she'll go aground and we'll be stuck here for the night. Look lively with that towline, Billy."

When the whale was safely lodged in the sand, Uncle Veenie took the boat out fifty yards over the shallow flats and left it. Then they turned their attention to the job at hand. For a few minutes they were silent, more than a little awed by the massiveness of this creature they had waylaid from the sea. The size of a whale is such that a human, surveying one recently taken, gradually assumes a feeling of embarrassed responsibility, even of blame. The impudence of mere man asserting physical supremacy over so majestic an animal removes all sport from the catch. That is the first feeling, correct in its essentials. There follows that unlovely defense of the reasoning vertebrate, the attitude of defiant assertion, an extension of "Even a cat can look at a king."

"Boy, oh boy, what a jaw," said Joan, humbled at last by the

proximity of an ancestor incomparably puissant.

"Yes, he swims along with his mouth open," said Uncle Veenie. "The water flows in, the plankton is strained off, and the water flows out again. A simple manner of life, without concern over grocery stores and fluctuating prices. I remember Arthur Benner, down to Eastham, hitching a team to a lower jawbone once and dragging it up from the beach. He kept it in his shed for several years. It was an object of curiosity to everybody."

"What's plankton?" asked Joan.

"A kind of little plant and animal life in the water, I believe they call it."

"Do you mean that's all they eat? No variety, no dessert, just this same trash, day after day?"

"They seem to make out all right," said Bill. "Doesn't stunt their growth, or anything serious."

"You can have it. Must be a bore being a whale. Where do they sleep, on top or on the ocean bed, as it were?"

Bill ran one hand over the whale's side, on which were growing a few vestigial hairs. "They don't sleep at all; that's the common belief. People have seen them follow ships for days on end. You see these flippers? That's what's left of hands. Once upon a time these fellows lived on land, like elephants and mastodons, but they crawled into the water for some reason, and then they lost their hair and took on a coat of blubber, to protect their body temperature."

"Listen to him! How come you know so much about whales?"

"I got it out of a book some people gave me—a wonderful book called *Castor to Cole*."

"Well, let's pick up a few thousand dollars' worth of ambergris and get back to town. It's way past noon and I'm starving. You can sell the stuff after lunch."

Uncle Veenie looked uneasy. "May be it isn't that simple. But we'll ring the cash register once things get moving. Anyways, we've got our whale staked out and claimed, and nobody can talk us out of that."

"According to my calculation, somebody's about to try," said Captain Cobb.

Across the water from Harding's Beach Point, with all engines turned to top speed, came the Coast Guard cutter, with a knot of gesticulating men in the bow. The foremost figure, a civilian, had his hands cupped to his mouth and was essaying a communication, lost in the sound of the motor and the waves along the shore.

"Drat me if it doesn't look like old grouchy Crowell, the Selectman," added Captain Cobb.

It has been remarked that no man-made machine in existence can look quite as purposeful as a Coast Guard cutter under full steam. So vivid and complete is the personification that boaters of conspicuous innocence have been known to up-anchor and clear off, convinced that their presence on the sea is alone a subject for reproach. Nevertheless, Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb, while sensible of impending friction, took up a proprietary stand beside their lawful property, not a trivial feat with a whale.

The procedure of halting in shallow water, lowering a gig, and heading for the scene of operations is carried out with offensive efficiency on a government cutter, it was felt by the shore party. One gets the notion, decided Bill, that the crew is not only trained but mechanized. It would have been a pleasure, for example, to see one of the davits break loose and spill the gig in the water stern-to, as in the case of most steamer disasters in the cinema. Even an overboard yecoman might have brightened up the day. Nothing occurred, however, to stem the onward march of inquisition. The boat was pulled whistling over the flats, and the next audible voice was that of Selectman Crowell.

"What in the hell's the matter with you fellows?" he yelled. "Haven't you got any better sense than to haul that damn thing in here?"

His phrasing was perhaps more emphatic than ordinarily, because of the identity of the pair he saw arrayed against him. Knowing the pioneer Cape Cod spirit, and its violent distaste for encroachment, he foresaw battle, and he was correct.

"Go on about your business, you pill-peddling old vulture. Who invited you to drop in?" replied Captain Cobb, taking notice of Mr. Crowell's former profession, which had been that of druggist.

For his part, the Captain, too, might have been less severe had not Mr. Crowell, during his tenure behind the counter, offered the most vigorous resistance to poaching among the cigars.

"Ezra Cobb, you ought to know better than to pull a whale up on this beach to rot. What are you trying to do—ruin the tourist business in Chatham?"

Crowell jumped out of the gig, followed by Assistant City Attorney Geshler, Chief Warrant Officer Perkins, and two seamen.

"Get your hand off of that whale," said Captain Cobb. "Or I'll have you arrested."

"You'll have me arrested! Jerry"—Mr. Crowell wheeled around to confront the City Attorney—"what ordinances could we call on if we have to force a showdown in this case?"

Mr. Geshler looked a trifle fussed. "It's a hard case to cover according to the laws," he said. "By stretching a point, we might invoke 320B, 'Improper dumping of refuse,' as well as 112A, 'Burial without a license,' whales being mammals, or 631, 'Congregating to cause a riot,' and, though I don't recommend it as apt to stand up in a higher court, 16-13, 'Overtime parking.'"

"How about murder and kidnapping?" suggested Captain Cobb.

Uncle Veenie coughed discreetly, evidently preparing to make a statement, and Mr. Crowell turned on him, as being a rational substitute for the Captain.

"Uncle Veenie, you're a reasonable man and you've seen the terrible conditions after a beached whale. Tons and tons of putrefying flesh, and a stink that carries for miles. Why, they had to practically close up South Wellfleet one summer. And they've still got a law up there that anybody taking the oil-melon out of a blackfish's head has got to dispose of the carcass. This thing'll give Chatham a bad name for years—it's too close in."

"We were aiming to dreen off the sperm oil and make a search for ambergris," said Uncle Veenie. "We weren't in noways intent on attacking the town as a whole."

Warrant Officer Perkins spoke up. "You won't get any sperm oil, or any ambergris either, out of this whale. She's an Atlantic right whale, and not worth a hoot for ought but blubber oil."

"Then we'll stick up a sign and boat people over from the Light,

and charge admission," said Captain Cobb. "If their noses are delicate, they can carry a little asafetida or something to contend with the whale. Though I've yet to see a dead fish do anybody serious injury."

"New boat?" inquired Officer Perkins.

"Secondhand new," said Uncle Veenie.

"Over 16 feet?"

"I hope she don't resemble a skiff. No, not to deceive you, she's 22 feet over-all."

"Got her registered?"

"The other owner said he would have the registration transferred tomorrow," volunteered Bill.

"How many people will she haul? How many passengers set forth in the registration?"

Uncle Veenie chuckled with pride. "How many? Enough and to spare. She's all boat—cedar throughout, with oak ribs and keel. I could transport twelve and fail to put her down over an inch in the water."

"How many life preservers have you got?"

"I've got one, as spry as a new chip, no busts in her anywhere--off the old Veendam. They haven't made life preservers like that in twenty-five years."

"Then you'll have to get eleven more," said Mr. Perkins. "Law."

"Wait a minute, now," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "First off, we're going to get rid of this whale. I tell you what I'll do—I'll give you fellows exactly twenty-four hours to clean up the mess. At the end of that time, if it's still here, we'll bring to bear every ordinance in the book, and I'll pass some ~~new~~ ones, if necessary. Haul this whale off the beach, and do it fast—that's all I have to say on the subject." He climbed back into the gig, and, after a moment, so did the others. As the seamen fixed oars in the tholes, Officer Perkins ventured to guess that, "You'll have a merry hell of a time of it. There was a new-moon tide this morning, and tomorrow ain't likely to be as boisterous. If it was me, I'd got help."

"Any time I need to call on the Coast Guard, I'll buy a Connecticut farm and retire," said Captain Cobb. "Watch out you

don't hit a rock on the way back."

For a few moments the shore party stood in silent dejection, watching the cutter get under way. Then Uncle Veenie said briskly, "Well, whaling's turned out a disappointment, but there wasn't ever a prospector that didn't hit a dry gulch once in a while. We'd better see about pulling this fellow off."

Captain Cobb made a countersuggestion, (which was rejected) to the effect that after dark they tow the whale through Stage Harbor, down the cut and into Pleasant Bay, where they could leave it on the beach in front of Chatham Light. "It's too far off here," he said. "The smell don't have a chance to work in right." It was his theory, based on his recent financial studies, that if the whale were beached near the Light, most of the property owners would be obliged to move and real estate values would be driven down sharply. "We could tell them the whale was the beginning of a cycle—people will believe anything to do with cycles—and then buy up some stuff cheap and retire with a fortune."

By now the tide had ebbed so far that the creature was impossible to budge. Straining at the towrope, the *Bertha T.* bucked and fishtailed, her stern drawn toward the water, in good tug fashion, but the tons and tons mentioned by Mr. Crowell were firmly implanted in the sand. Uncle Veenie recovered his rope and surmised that they might have better luck on the next flood, at 2 A.M., if she hadn't wallowed down so far as to take root for good. "What we need's a brief tempest," he said. "Nothing will clear off a beach like a canvasful of wind."

Captain Cobb remained acidulous during the trip through the harbor, remarking on the rather widespread decline in everything, with specific reference to Chatham. "Used to be, whales coming ashore here were regarded as a blessing and not a curse," he said. "The townsfolk depended on them to pay the minister's salary, and they *did* pay it, too, except when the minister got there first, in which case they generally stole some cargo and paid him. Another thing, the Coast Guard's getting too uppity; I'd like to see it dissolved. People nowadays are protected to death—it's unhealthy."

In the narrow cut-through between the harbor and Pleasant

Bay, the water had dropped so low that the *Bertha* bogged down in the middle and stuck. "Now we are in a pickle," said Uncle Veenie, throwing out the anchor. "First time I ever recollect leaving a boat in this locality. It's humiliating."

"You'll find a good many hitches to owning a boat you can't drag," Bill told him. Stumping along in the soft sand, Uncle Veenie observed that, "I'm dogged if I don't sometimes think it's a complication being wealthy. I used to be well rested before I got rich and bought a restful boat. I kind of halfway hope I don't have any more windfalls soon—I won't last out the summer."

They talked it all over and decided to hire one of the diesel trawlers to haul off the whale. Bill ventured meekly that "the Coast Guard would be glad to——" but they put the idea down instantly. "I'd eat the whale first," announced Captain Cobb, effectively ending the subject. At Nickerson's Wharf, where the fishing fleet stayed, they struck a bargain with the Perregeaux twins: \$18.75 to take the whale off on the next flood and deposit it in a current where it was apt to come to rest in the vicinity of Harwichport. Captain Cobb offered to make the price an even twenty if it landed squarely on the Snow Inn breakwater, and so they left things. Altogether, as he remarked an hour later, the venture had been costly but it would be worth while if Harwich got the whale. Uncle Veenie had already recovered his ever elastic optimism. "Man, oh man," he said, "we gave those boys a trimming, and so they'll find tonight. Anybody else would have charged thirty dollars for a job such as that. It only goes to show that them as have, gets. Everything we touch this summer seems to turn to money."

■ ■ ■ Myra's day had been cheerless but congenial. Like most wives, she enjoyed being alone; there was nobody

to question or nag. Since to admit this would be to forgo a moral advantage, she usually said, with a gallant smile, that she had been "all right, perfectly all right, really—don't worry about it." Consciousness had visited her at eleven, a misty, twilight life within a narrow periphery, encompassing few objects and those unstable. Her impression was strong that she had awakened turned around, that her feet were where her head ought to be. But this was not so: a fat lamp took offensive shape before her eyes. In the not unpleasant confines of her stupor, she tried to recall whether she had shaken out two pills or three. The good red pills, friend to the weary and the downtrodden. Normally arranged, she was a healthy girl, with emotions naturally buoyant; now she had sharp pangs of remembrance that came quickly, hurt, were sealed off by a process of unthinking self-preservation, and were replaced by a flood of voluptuous distraction. The pangs were a part of her permanent depression; from minute to minute her existence was physically sound.

The vibrant drumbeat of full rationality brought the guilty compulsion to get up and do. Lying face down, still relaxed in the barbiturate separation of nerve and cerebrum, of the kind that leaves skin grooves where the cover wrinkles press, she savored the heightened sweetness of repose gone on beyond its due. She stretched, tightening her muscles hard against the bed, and, after a moment of dizziness, rolled over reluctantly. With an arm that seemed oddly detached, she brushed the hair from her eyes and then groped along the wall for the buzzer.

Alice's face, when she arrived, bore the look of sympathetic alignment, of union against the common enemy. She, too, it said, found Man an insufferable tyranny and she stood ready to throw her weight into the breach whenever it was needed.

"Coffee, Allie—hot and black. In the pot."

"Course, Mrs. Willis. I understand exactly."

Do you really? Certainly you have sharp eyes that don't miss much. What have you seen to be deplored in this house of strains and coalitions?

"Anything doing, Allie?"

"Miss Joan and the Mister left early. Walter's raking the beach."

"We'll have a scratch lunch, or maybe nothing at all. Where'd they go?"

"Off in the red car, Mrs. Willis. They were laughing the way they do."

"They're strong advocates of the merry jest. Youth will be served—I've always said so."

"I served them breakfast, in the dining room."

"Well, serve me some coffee, before I throw up. Things are pretty largely out of focus. What's that bear doing in the corner?"

"That's the black rocker with your mink stole over the back. Miss Joan came in yesterday and tried it on."

With deliberate effort, Myra raised her head about an inch above the bed. "Tell me," she said, "do you ever feel that that child's bottom looks neglected without a hairbrush against it?"

"I'm not saying a word, Mrs. Willis."

When the coffee came, in a tall silver pot, Alice said, "Will there be anything else? Shall I ring Dr. Brokaw?"

"Leave him lay. I may try that other fellow next time. Brokaw's been going in for some very nasty green stuff lately, in a bottle. One more dose might kill me. Just turn on the bath, Allic, and make a graceful exit."

After three cups of coffee, drunk in a semi-recumbent attitude, propped up on one elbow, she felt a humming of her blood along its main thoroughfares, and she performed a slow, sinuous movement that left her seated on the edge of the bed. She looked around, not displeased. It was a fragrant, feminine room, done herself last summer, as a gratuity for the owners and a balm for Myra—soft carpeting from wall to wall, rose-stained lamps, arty prints and drawings, colors and designs and textures singly innocent and sensual in combination. Standing up, she walked herself into a pair of mules, and then, finding them less soothing than the carpet, kicked them off. She became aware of an indefinable craving. On her bedside table stood the silver pot with silent invitation. It was still warm, and she poured out a fourth cup, but the taste had lost its magic. The liquid was tepid, and a little oily. At her dressing table, an illusory thing of gleaming glass and silver, she sank down and stared at herself across the duplicate fields of flasks

and combs and probes and pins and waste and sprays and trays and pastel boxes. Out of the darkened background floated her image, a shadowy penitential, beautiful but ill. The raven halo of her hair, her deep-set eyes, the ivory pallor of her skin—a resisting Poppaea in a sunburned age—fulfilled her pictorial sense of the tragic, and she leaned closer, too close. There were imitations of a pimple below the splendid arch of her neck. But she rubbed it, and it disappeared. No blemish for as far as she could see down into the green silk nightgown marred her hopeful dream of perfection.

The fantasy ritual of arising. Getting up quickly, she crossed her arms over her waist and lifted the nightgown, wriggling it past her chest. Then she went to the long and candid mirror inside her wardrobe doors and stood in narcissistic delirium, driven from the nightmare maze of adulthood into the safe, warm womb of adolescence. For a few seconds she pirouetted in wonder, a nymph before a gladed pool, the enraptured libertine's glimpse of unattainable heaven. But the vision ended with a sudden tinkle of the Chinese glasses beyond the wall. The moment slipped out of her grasp. She returned to the dressing table and lit the only cigarette she could find—a charred and twisted butt—and removed from her moist lower lip a piece of stuck paper. Then she expelled the smoke in a slowly diffusing stream.

From here Myra's progress was steady. Too tired to brush her hair, she ran it through with a comb, afterward holding the comb in her mouth while she bunched the hair with a ribbon to suspend it above the bath. And in the bathroom thick with steam she stood on the scales, absently noting her weight, plucked her eyebrows, and brushed her teeth, leaving the toothpaste cap on the floor where it had fallen. The brush she tossed into the drinking glass. Her bath water felt scalding hot, but she stepped in, standing on tiptoes till the burn subsided, and squatted down to lie back inch by inch. The delicious sensation of poison and fatigue giving way before the therapeutic heat turned her bones to jelly. She allowed her breasts to rise tautly above the surface, to taste the cool air, and then to sink back within the protective fire. Her soul was wholly at peace, her tormentors part of the finished past and the unimportant future.

On the floor beside the tub were several books and a magazine. Water had been at the books, raising ugly white patches on the covers, like lichen on birchbark. As her temperature rose, bringing a kind of prickly boredom, she groped among the books until she felt one of recognizable dimensions. This she brought into the tub with a look of faint annoyance. It was a new edition of *Green Mansions*, charmingly illustrated, a present from her husband, whose disgust with her literary diet had finally exploded in a forty-five-minute diatribe. He would find her, he said, some books that even she could understand but which still had traces of merit, a combination that he indicated might defy the best brains in the nation. Wearily, she flipped the pages to a stained and dog-eared mark then plowed forward for several paragraphs. She found the going laborious, much hampered by jungle and improbable aborigines. She closed the book and opened it again in the middle. The same condition prevailed: rank verdure sprawled everywhere, even over the illustrations, making narrative painful and limiting the scope of human activity. By accident, she encountered a Woodsy scene that had erotic possibilities, but the aborigines pranced in and ruined it. She tried again well toward the end but broke off with the daughter of the Didi up a tree and trilling for assistance. On the whole, it was depressing, lacking in entertainment. With a negligent gesture, she wafted it under the sink, where it fell with a classical splash. Then she recovered the magazine, which she had intended to do from the start, and resumed her scrutiny of a defection by one Isabel Watts, entitled "Connie and the Convertible." There had been no question of animus toward fiction of quality; she simply hadn't any interest in South American vegetation. Neither, she thought, did the drawings catch the eye—the figures were unattractively clad. Moreover, there were certain elusive passages that she suspected were designed to make her Think, an impertinence she rejected as being inappropriate to the moment.

Dressing, Myra seized and discarded five separate motifs; then she selected a frock she had settled on while still lying in bed. Before slipping it over her head she did her face, a task that consumed twenty minutes. She was, however, gathering momentum for the

remaining day and even assuming a species of reckless and energetic bustle, singing and whistling as she flung back and forth, a spurious display of purpose that never failed to irritate the nominal head of the family. Downstairs, she strode through the rooms like a Queen of the May, airy but responsible, commanding but intensely feminine and squeamish, pausing near the kitchen to straighten a picture and flick off a sandy table. Upstairs, the apartment she had left rested after the battle. By half closing his eyes, Bill often summoned in fancy the shattered trees of Guadalcanal, the rent black earth of Iwo Jima. All closet and wardrobe doors were ajar; the bed had been clawed and clothing widely distributed; a trail of soiled Kleenex performed a wavering loop between the boudoir and the bathroom, like a children's paper chase; the dressing table was a surgical aftermath; the bathtub was ringed; the rug in a ball; the books soaking; the sink clogged with pancake dust, and the plumbing left neglected.

But downstairs, an ornament of daintiness supreme, a rare and flawless petal of unpremeditation, Myra proceeded to the sanctum of her first lieutenant.

"Will you be wanting breakfast now, Mrs. Willis?"

"I'm starving. Carve me up a half grapefruit and two pieces of melba, will you, Allie?"

After eating these pallid viands, while looking over the mail, she arose and did her accounts. This consisted of penciling a "B," for bill, on two envelopes and question marks on two others, one a charitable request from a reform school and the other an appeal from the National Chicken Pox Foundation. Then, with a brisk sigh over a tricky job faithfully attended, she got up, plucked a chocolate from a box on the table, tossed the mail into a brass coal scuttle, and sailed outside. She had a ledger but it usually ran from two months to a year behind. And in any event, her husband came along the trail behind her, like movie writers attacking a film in rounds.

The sun looked searching and she returned for a picture hat. It was pleasant sitting outdoors painting her nails. The pungent smell of the lacquer, the distant rumble of the surf, the postcard arrangement of the landscape all served to intensify her concentration on

the remarks made by Freddie Hogg at the recent Provincetown luncheon. Soon her flagging spirit would descend to the basic maladjustment; now she was thinking about the good things.

Finished, she lifted her hands like tigers' claws and wiggled the fingers in the drying breeze. For a second, she toyed with the notion of doing her toes, but she desisted: her husband didn't like it. Now, for the first time, she felt the acid sting of invitation somewhere deep in her stomach. It was nearly one. He had no right to shatter the schedule without so much as a note or a word in Allie's ear. But she pushed the feeling down with resolution, making his obvious excuses of the occasion. There was nothing to do. The hour was awkward; Lila would be stuffing her educated spawn. The child was only tolerable when Bill was around to chaffe and squirm. Bill. Having held them apart so long, she allowed his face and significance slowly to converge. And as she expected, the dull throb of disappointment altered the complexion of the day. What she had been enjoying was a reprieve, a fiesta interregnum between the continued chapters of reality. After a period of torture, the safety valves of hope and disbelief closed off the bitter flow through that conduit of her brain, and she resolved to make one more examination of The Damning Letters. While she shrank from seeing again the harsh and lurid samples of his perfidy, she had at the same time a morbid urge to read them for their own sake, an urge prompted partly by solitude and partly by the aphrodisiacal sun.

Upstairs again, she removed her dress to guard it from wrinkles and went into a low drawer of her dressing table. There, at the bottom, spaced carefully between the pages of a Bible, as being secure from investigation, were eleven letters in longhand, well thumbed, somewhat soiled, pieces of disruptive treasure. She took them out and lay back on her bed to study them, steeling herself for the first shock of their message. This over, she read and reread them in detail, slowly emerging from a numbed horror of the generality into a warm zone of embarrassment at the passages themselves. She turned over on her face and dug deep into the crumpled pillow, her mind a rising storm of uncontrollable emotions. Toward this scene of confusion her day had marched with subconscious but inevitable direction. And in her dominant position she finally went

to sleep, and slept without moving until after three o'clock.

When she dressed and came downstairs there had been some subtle rearrangement of her personality. Her swinging stride was that of a person who had established a heedless superiority to humanity and human opinion. In it were small wisps of defiance, but a blatant and contrived self-satisfaction blazed in her challenging eye. Though it was a mood of compensation, and would pass, her behavior was apt to be dangerous while it lasted. She encountered Alice, coming out of the kitchen.

"You're that pale, Mrs. Willis. I often wonder why you don't get a nice tan like the others."

"Perhaps I will. Mix me a martini, Allie. I think I'll take the in-board out for a run."

Alice's evident hesitation brought on only an admonition to hurry and a revision of the original order: "Make it a double, or say six to one. If there's anything turns my stomach, it's surplus vermouth floating around."

Actually, there was almost nothing in the entire catalogue of food and drink that Myra wanted less than a martini at three o'clock in the afternoon, but she envisioned it as a snap of the fingers at the world, and she usually liked the second drink once the first was down. Taking the glass, she tossed off a sizable portion of the sharp, icy liquid, smiled, gagged, savored Alice's disapproval, and called loudly for another.

When at last she descended the leafy path toward the beach, she was in a state of invulnerable bliss. A rippling chuckle issued from deep within her, an explosion of general hilarity over everything. She had decided to get dammed good and brown, and if they didn't like it they knew what they would do. Besides, she thought, no woman is ever conquered who is still equal to the sum of her parts. Gone was the picture hat; her only concession to prudence was a slapdash application of sun lotion, part of it on her dress, which latter seemed in peculiar contrast to the outing. Although she had a little trouble with the dinghy, she succeeded in getting it off the beach and in rowing it out to the boat. The two came together with a whack that would have curdled her husband's blood, but she only said, aloud, "Go right ahead. Think I care?"

Once off the mooring and spinning down the tide, she felt a sense of exquisite power. The motor had started without effort, and the boat seemed a conscious part of her headlong flight into emancipation. She lit a cigarette, ducking from the wind, and established herself on the small mahogany starboard seat, tending the auxiliary wheel with her feet. In this attitude she passed the sightseeing ferry of the Chatham Bars Inn, whose passengers stared with unconcealed interest. In return, not wishing to appear aloof, she yelled "Boo!" and wagged both hands in her ears. While enjoying their discomfited faces she ran over one of Henry Henrichsen's lobster buoys, neatly severing its line. She watched it float away, its green and white pattern in lively dance over a little rip and into the hurrying channel. "Liberate them all," she called after the ferry. "Shellfish and humans. Stone crabs do not a prison make, nor Chatham Bars a cage." It was grand to be freed at last from the picayune conventions of the insect world to which, until this afternoon, she had belonged. She was dazed with wonder how ever she could have been tormented by the shallow burdens of an undeserving society, and she was fired with eagerness to exhibit her new-found worth.

Here was a handy cove in which to turn and start the process of taking on tan, the first-flung pennant of her independence. Before she cut the motor, the keel crunched noisily in a mussel bed and she smiled with amusement over something that once had seen her bawled out, and even weeping. Taking a serape from the locker, and tucking up her dress, she slipped over the side into the knee-deep water. And ashore she followed one of the meaningless paths through the saw-edged grass and into the Nauset dunes. A succession of silent hollows opened off to the left and right, secret eyries where nobody would snoop and pry. But that was yesterday; today she didn't care. It was tempting to arrange her nakedness on a slope within view of the Lighthouse telescope. But her inner nature was too sequestered, too monogamistic to offer up gratification on so broad a scale. Finding at length a sandy basin all surrounded by banks and open to the sun, she spread the serape and threw aside her clothes. Under one tasseled edge, she rolled up sand for a pillow, on her eyelids she placed pieces of broken shell. High over-

head the gulls cried warnings of trespass, and beneath her the sand trembled to the rhythmic lunges of the surf. The moment, she knew, was pivotal; with dates of before and after. Never at any time had she been in such fragile attunement to the psychic forces of her life, so that before removing the shells she had identified the soft tread of familiar footsteps on the sand leading up to her hide-away.

Straight from our talkative Alice, she thought, and to the figure that had paused in the cleft between the dunes, she said, "Hi, cowboy. Come to Mama!"

12 The reward came through in two weeks, and Uncle Veenie made his down payment. He handed over the money, new fifties, without regret. Bills of such stamp were lacking in character; besides they had been too easily acquired. The paper dollar was a dear old friend, the five was a joy to him and a credit to Mr. Lincoln, the ten bore traces of suspicion, and the twenty was a matter for reproach. Uncle Veenie admired wealth in the abstract: particularly brassy samples of it made him uneasy.

As for Captain Cobb, he stepped out of the bank with a look of crafty anticipation. Like a soldier on the verge of battle, he sensed a confrontation of the will-o'-the-wisp Fortune. It would be, he knew, a critical meeting.

Heretofore he had been hampered by a conspicuous dearth of capital. Except for a brief period after his father died, some forty years before, he had never had as much as a hundred dollars at one time in his life. His father's insurance (a modest sum that was considerably reduced because of the necessity for hiring a lawyer to collect it) he had invested in what seemed a foolproof system for robbing fish weirs, but the owners had hidden in a fog and collared both him and his associate. The Captain had put in six pleas-

ant months on the work farm at Lawrence, a model prisoner, sunny, democratic, anecdotal, trusted with the warden's choicest belongings, some of which he was using to this day. He had come out vowing to go straight, and had done so, saving for trivial lapses of the sort rather applauded than condemned on Cape Cod.

The bank had opened at nine o'clock, and Captain Cobb had his money by nine-two. As he left he picked up a new blotter and a fairly good pen, on the theory that there was no telling when the opportunity might arise again, and it was better to be safe than sorry. He wanted a cigar, but when he went into the drugstore and bought a cup of coffee, the prescription clerk watched him like a hawk. The unfairness of this scrutiny, directed at a man of means, irked him and he determined to get even. "Here, you, give me a nickel's worth of horehound," he snapped at the clerk, a young man who was alone on the job. He knew for sure that such candy existed in the store; it was kept in a dusty bottle in the rear. From the clerk's viewpoint, the situation was ticklish, one touched on but not covered in full at the pharmacy school. He hesitated, opened his mouth, eyed the nickel being tapped against the counter, and then sprinted for the back. It was close; his old dean would have been proud of him. In less than two minutes after taking the order, he had whisked through the doorway, streaked down a narrow passage, snatched off the bottle top and extracted the confection, and returned, knocking over only a small jar of cough syrup. Even so, he was late, through no fault of his own. In Captain Cobb he was dealing with a shoplifter of extraordinary gifts, a man agile and deft, uncommonly fleet, rich in stratagems and mendacious beyond the dreams of eloquence. By the time the clerk was pounding down the backstretch, the Captain was reseated on his old stool and in possession of three Dutch Masters, two White Owls and a packet of Mexican cigarillos, nasty but acceptable in a crisis.

"Anything else?" asked the clerk, with a hard look.

"This ought to see me through the day," replied Captain Cobb. He stepped down the street to his hitchhiking corner, ready for Boston and the track. It was fine weather for traveling, cool and slightly cloudy, and he made good time. His first ride was with an elderly couple from Utica, who were en route back to Buzzards

Bay, where they believed that accommodations were cheaper than those on the lower Cape. They had enjoyed Chatham, though, and the woman (referred to by the husband as "Mother") thought the windmills cute. Their beneficence toward the Captain was wholly accidental. They had pulled up to inquire about the route, and he had supplied the answers from the back seat. Once he was in, they could see no polite way to dislodge him, particularly so since he talked almost continuously and was, on the whole, deaf to interruption.

Departing, the Captain thanked them condescendingly and picked up a ride in a bakery truck. He got as far as White Horse Beach and then climbed in with a kind of traveling supervisor, who had a group of youths hawking magazines on the Cape. The week had gone poorly, the man said, with unusual expenses. One of the boys, arousing the wrath of a householder merely by representing himself to be a census taker, had become involved with a Doberman pinscher and had required medical attention to the tune of \$9.80. When Captain Cobb expressed sympathy, the supervisor tried to sell him some magazines. Learning that no down payment was needed, the Captain then placed a large order, laboriously filling out the blanks as the car bounced along toward Assinippi. To Uncle Veenie he decided to send the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *St. Nicholas*, and to Uncle Veenie's wife, *Esquire* and *The Outdoorsman*. There were many stimulating titles to choose from. To an elderly crank, confined to a wheel chair, who once had mentioned Captain Cobb to the police, he sent a three years' subscription to *Holiday*, and to Good⁶ Samuel, of the annual laundry, a trial offer of *Glamour*. To these and other orders he affixed the name of Cape Cod's original settler, William Nickerson, with the simple address, "Woodlawn," a local cemetery, and, alighting in Weymouth, shook hands with the driver in the comforting knowledge of a good deed graciously performed.

His ride into Boston was with two brilliantly decorated girls, smelling vaguely of alcohol and chlorophyll, who whipped over the roads past Boston Harbor and the airport at hilarious speeds and finally attracted the attention of a patrolman who was parked in a grove, trying to get some sleep. He nosed them to the shoulder

crossly and walked up to their convertible with a smoldering glare, taking out the usual notebook and pencil. They seemed unperturbed and even in a mysterious state of uncontrollable mirth; however, their faces sobered when he reached the car.

"Where do you think you're going, to a fire?" one of them asked him.

The patrolman opened his mouth in shocked disbelief, but the girl at the wheel, a brunette with a scarf fixed sleekly around her hair, turned and pointed to Captain Cobb.

"It's his fault," she said. "He was driving."

"Say, who do you think you are?"

"I'm his gun moll. I want to get out, see, but they won't let me."

"She's heard too much—she knows who the Big Guy is," suggested the other girl.

"Listen here, I've got a good mind to run you in," said the patrolman.

Captain Cobb, who had been listening to this exchange with uncasiness, having had practically no luck intimidating policemen, now ventured some soothing remarks. "Officer, I think I can straighten this out—" he began, when the girl driver turned around again.

"You sing on us, Lefty, and you'll get a shoe full of concrete."

"Don't pay any attention to him, Officer," added her companion. "He's got a monkey on his back. Dope."

"Hand over your driver's license!" bellowed the patrolman. "And shut up, all of you!"

The second girl whispered, "Don't do it, Myrt—it looks like a frame," but the driver took a red wallet from her bag, went through the ritual feminine fumbling, and then came up with the document in question, which she held out demurely.

The patrolman read it slowly, twice. "O'Rourke," he said. "And the address. The Lieutenant Governor's daughter?"

"I've been surrounded by corrupt politicians. I never had a chance."

"Go ahead, Miss O'Rourke," said the officer. "Drive on, and maybe take things a little easier. Have a nice day." He touched his cap.

Down the road a piece, she said to Captain Cobb, "That was pretty darn white of you, saying you were thriving. I won't forget it."

"Code of the O'Rourkes," the other girl explained.

They let him out in Brookline, after handing him a card and asking him to call them up sometime. Examining it as they drove away, he read, "Tony's Italian-American Cuisine. Chicken-in-a-Basket. Breakfasts served," and an address near Scituate. Captain Cobb lifted his hand to signal an oncoming car, then changed his mind and walked two blocks to the subway.

At Suffolk Downs, he transferred his money to a niche inside his shirt, on guard against the nimble fingers of race-track dips, for whose professional skill he had vast respect. He was, moreover, reluctant to break a fifty at the gate, before the throng of onlookers. He found a discarded racing form, and marked it up, recommending mostly horses he'd never heard of, but he tried seven different parties before he sold it for enough to buy a general admission ticket. Then, shouldering his way into line ahead of the purchaser, he had a stroke of fortune.

"This is the one," said a well-dressed official beside the ticket taker, and he laid a hand on Captain Cobb's shoulder. Following his natural instinct, the Captain started to run, but the man cried out in booming tones, "Congratulations! You're our millionth customer, and the track has a little surprise for you."

Captain Cobb was photographed, given a seat in the clubhouse, a season's pass to the grounds, and presented with a nice certificate, to the absolute rage of a man in line behind him, to whom he had sold the worthless form.

As an augury of good luck, he reflected when he hurried upstairs, carrying his certificate, the incident at the gate could hardly be matched. The signs presaged a gala day, perhaps one unique in his experience, and so it turned out. In the years to come, he never recalled it without the most violent surge of emotion.

By ordinary standards, Captain Cobb would have been considered richly endowed. His life had been given over to congenial dalliance, and his conscience had the unclouded purity of spring water. Regrettably, good fortune at the track is not part of a general prosperity.

The gods have decreed that there are those among us who are not meant to prevail against the simple arithmetic of horses frisking toward a wire. Captain Cobb had always been pre-eminently a member of this group. If he bet to win, the horse showed; if he bet an outsider, the favorite came in easily. He had been known to seed the field and bet the three least likely choices; when the winners were posted, his first hunch had been correct—they remained the least likely choices.

Over the years he had helped support several tracks, and his humor as he addressed the employees was proprietary. Today, he felt, would be different. There sang in him that hum of harmonious vibrations that comes perhaps once in a lifetime. The elements were all in order, the muse was waiting and ready, the horses on this afternoon were posted for his special convenience. And like a thunderbolt a name leaped out of the entrants for the first race. Clam Bed, at 36 to 1, represented not so much a hunch as a mandate. With a chuckle of satisfaction, he extracted his ragged wallet and made preparations to plunge. Before doing so he reviewed the list for race number two, thinking in terms of the Daily Double. A coup with Clam Bed and another unknown might establish him in comfort for years. Staring him straight in the eye was Tony's Wife, at the neat figure of 106 to 1. Sharp recollections of the saucy girls and their calling card gave him a thrill of triumph. Eager to lay out his cash, he nevertheless made a quick trip to the stables. The odds on Tony's Wife were so ornate that he was unable to help wondering if the horse had maybe three legs, or was suffering from arthritis. All was in order. The spouse of Tony was a cadaverous roan, with a bile-shot eye whose acid gleam suggested that Tony was not the easiest fellow in the world to live with. She looked like a horse whose best friend had just been given a mink ~~scarf~~.

Captain Cobb wasted no time in returning to the windows. His capital was shortly reduced by forty dollars, or ten for each horse on the nose and twenty for the foolproof Double. He took up a position at the clubhouse rail to watch his first choice smother the opposition. At the cheery cry of "They're off!" Clam Bed sprang viciously out of the gate, in eighth place out of a field of eleven, and began rapidly reducing the space between himself and the last-

place horse. It was no easy task. Only by developing a limp on the backstretch and by making leisurely passes at some trackside daisies was he able to tail-out Sundown, bringing up the rear, and score a clean-cut flop.

Captain Cobb stood brooding on his life with the thoroughbreds. In no sense could it be called one of those depressing careers of weary ups and downs. Rather, it was one of uninterrupted downs. Only a man of unchokable hope could have endured it thus far. However, Captain Cobb might have been described as a horse player's horse player; already he was thinking about Tony's Wife and her look of bilious determination. At odds of 106 to 1, she could salvage the afternoon. He watched the race from his seat. At the break, Tony's Wife launched one of the showiest leaps ever seen at Suffolk Downs, a start that put her a length and a half ahead before the race had gone fifty yards. The sole drawback to this galvanic boost was that she left her jockey in the gate. Freed of superfluous weight, she moved on around with the well-oiled ease of the champion. She gave herself a grand ride, beautifully paced, in perfect position—out approximately seventy yards in advance of her colleagues—and with plenty of reserve left for a magnificent run at the finish. To nail things down, she went around again, and then jumped the fence and disappeared in the direction of Newton Center.

The day was filled with lowlights. At one point, before the fourth race, the Captain overheard two exceedingly shady-looking men talking in undertones in a niche beneath the grandstand. "The boys are coming down hard on Highway Patrol," one of them said. "Ed was telling me. Keep it under your hat." Even in the face of this authentic cue, Captain Cobb played it safe by making a personal circuit. It was just this sort of tip that had got him into hot water so often before. The way to beat a diabolic muse is outguess it. No doubt he was expected to fall for this whispered aside and plunge on a total wreck. He hurried to the paddock.

It was almost exactly as he had expected. The horse Highway Patrol appeared to be leaning against a post, coughing. The Captain heard somebody say, "Why don't they take that dilapidated old hayburner out of here before he falls down and hurts one of the

other horses?" The man's companion made an unintelligible response, something about a claiming race and a transfer of ownership. Uplifted in vindication, Captain Cobb sprinted to the betting windows. He felt immensely grateful to Ed and the boys. As a result of their little indiscretion, the odds on favorite Blue Lagoon would be greatly improved. This, then, was his chance. He raced up with confidence and presented a fifty-dollar bill.

Five minutes after he had left the paddock, there transpired an incident of disturbing illegality. As one groom held Highway Patrol's head, uttering a diversionary stream of conversation, another, in the act of saddling, pinched up some skin and made a quick injection with a small syringe. It was done with grace and skill, and nobody saw it. A moment later, as the saddling groom, like a magician, shifted the diversion, the man at the head sprayed the horse's nostrils with ephedrine.

Highway Patrol, receiving his charge, brightened up as if hearing offstage music. The coughing ceased. It had been, at the worst, merely an expression of ennui, and the languid stance a mark of chronic hypochondria. The truth was that Patrol, though grown, displayed symptoms of second colthood, the by-product of a nature intensely temperamental. He thought racing stupid and in fact detested all forms of sport, including romping and nibbling. What he probably wanted, in his mute, horsish way, was to Create. The usual avenues of painting, writing, and composing being closed off, he lapsed into torpor, with hints of sinus trouble. Now all was changed. Clearing his throat, he whinied shrilly, bobbed his head up and down several times, and kicked the second groom in the stomach.

The race, today well-remembered history, was run to a stunned silence. By the first turn, Highway Patrol, having picked up signs of competition, had separated himself from the herd and was racing against time. On the backstretch he introduced variations into his style, with sorties to this side and that, as well as a number of joyful bucks. Past the grandstand he neighed in derision, and he finished the race, as they say in football, standing up, that is, walking on his hind legs. His companions, the career athletes, were lost somewhere in the dust of his inimitable wake.

The lengthening slants of the afternoon sun suffused Captain Cobb's face with a soft, thoughtful glow as he sat reflecting on this last turn of events. Clearly he should have heeded the insiders. Fortune had shown her face briefly, but he had pushed her aside. Next time . . .

At a quarter to five, Captain Cobb's situation was briefly as follows: In the course of eight races, he had backed eleven losers and one winner, a favorite on whom the odds took a critical downward turn in the last few minutes, making it possible for Captain Cobb to collect \$2.04 on his two-dollar ticket. The victory did little for his morale. His remaining stake, as the horses filed by for the ninth and last race, amounted to a few pennies over six dollars.

Under the circumstances, his conclusion was logical. He decided that he might as well be broke as the way he was, and going to the two-dollar window, he listlessly bought three tickets on the first number that engaged his vision. It happened to be a horse known affectionately as Stumblebum, that so far supported its reputation as to fall down five minutes later and break a leg on the backstretch.

Turning away from the windows, wistfully deploring the loss of his \$250, Captain Cobb himself stumbled over a black object that scooted out before him with a leathery scrape on concrete. His lifelong chance had come. The object was a wallet, in good fat shape. He stooped over quickly, gathered it up, and thrust it into his shirt. Then he stepped with great nimbleness around to the men's room and bespoke a compartment.

Before he had finished counting, his senses were reeling. What he had recovered was a purse containing something over three thousand dollars. Though he went over it five times, he never got the same figure twice, and, in his high excitement, he gave it up.

Now began a grave wrestle with his conscience. Emerging from the lounge, he made two rather cursory excursions in the direction of the stewards' room; then he sat down to think it over. The money had been found in front of the hundred-dollar window, hence the owner, or late owner, was clearly rich as well as exceedingly careless. The money would never be missed. Indeed, it would now be put to profitable use uplifting the downtrodden where before it would certainly have gone into the pockets of the politicians, via the pari-

mutuels, and would doubtless have been used, in the end, to plague and harry their constituents.

Thus went Captain Cobb's reasoning. In the end, he saw the incident as a kind of epiphany. The gods had made themselves manifest, and he was no man to argue with Divinity. In the interest of simple safety, he concocted an elaborate network of coups by which he had won the money on the horses, and before he reached the outer gate, he half-way believed it himself. Fittingly enough, the last sound he heard as the pleasure dome fell away astern was a sharp report that made Stumblebum available for the glueworks.

Ordinarily after the races, Captain Cobb would have pressed for home, journeying in sporadic hitches and getting in late. In that way he could be ready for the morning boat rentals. This evening, however, boats, if they existed at all, sailed at the extreme outer edge of his mind, too far removed to have commercial significance. He had resolved to play squire, to take a hotel room and share the folk culture of the region, possibly a prize fight or a pep show in Scollay Square. The idea of plodding along the highway like a common bindle stiff was distasteful to him; moreover, there was something incongruous about hitchhiking with three thousand dollars in your shirt. It was downright furtive.

On the few occasions when he had rested overnight in Boston, he had stopped at Mac's Stag Hotel, which knew him and had, therefore, a kind of family atmosphere. For fifty cents one could be provided with an army cot and the privilege of lining up at a basin with a reasonably clean towel. It would have been a matter exceedingly painful to Mac to know that, today, Captain Cobb, of the Cape Cod branch of his custom, was planning to stuff a secondhand suitcase full of bricks and apply for chamber ~~at the~~ Copley Plaza. Although he had been rich but an hour and a half, the Captain was prey to the first light blush of snobbery. And following the usual course, he felt a compensating onset of Good Works. He'd like to do something for the boys at Mac's; perhaps later on he would endow a badly needed toilet seat. The notion pleased him. He could see the inscription: "The Ezra T. Cobb Chair of Fraternal Equality," a course in the humanities.

As he faced the sapping elegance of the moneyed life to follow, he was overpowered by exhaustion, too tired to scout the pawn shops for his luggage. He subsided on a bench in Boston Common, with a cigar, and watched the last twilight send the pigeons fluttering off, one by one, to their favorite perches. A dapper, gray-haired man with rich clothes and a gold-headed stick came strolling across the lawn, spreading largess to the birds from a striped paper bag. It seemed to be filled with a species of macaroons. This was aristocracy with a vengeance, thought the Captain, and he winced for the poor crumbs he had offered in the years gone by.

"What a pleasant evening," remarked his visitor in cultured tones.

"Yes, indeed, isn't it?" replied Captain Cobb with an affected accent that he envisioned as being virgin Bostonian.

The man sat down nearby and carelessly emptied the remaining confections in a direction off to his right. Captain Cobb checked an impulse to recover one or two, remembering in time his safe new estate. They fell into easy conversation. The newcomer divulged in a modest way that he was a banker whose wife was out of town. "I'm having an old man's night at his club," he remarked with a rueful smile. "Twenty years ago there were a dozen things I'd be eager to do with my little freedom. Now—I feed the pigeons."

During this speech, the Captain had thought of and rejected six different poses, each more ornate than the last. Then, for some reason never very clear to him afterward, he decided to tell the truth. "I'm from down on the Cape—Chatham way," he said. "I rent dories down there."

"Ah, yes," said his companion. "We summered there for some years. But when the children are grown up and gone . . ."

"I was out to the race track today," continued Captain Cobb relentlessly, driven by the need to tell someone, anyone, of his windfall, "where I won close on to three thousand dollars. I was sitting here trying to get used to it."

"My dear fellow!" cried the other, slapping his knee. "Congratulations! I have never myself managed to come away with anything but resolutions for the future. I'm envious. But how, precisely, did

you manage it, if you don't mind my asking?"

Far from minding, Captain Cobb was in that well-known fever of articulation common to all horse players, golfers, and others, in which no tiny detail of one's winning play could be omitted without pain to the listener. "Well, I was right behind, mind you, the last bunker on number five fairway, and the caddy naturally pulled out an eight-iron, but, I had this inspiration, see, and I said, 'Just hand me that damn putter, will you?' The slope being the way it was——" and so on ad infinitum. This is a sample.

The Captain supplied the picture in loving outline. And he had a fine audience. They chatted briskly with knowing exchanges, chuckled, and savored the progression of the grand coup.

"And now," said the man, whose name was Mr. Wycoff, "if you will indulge a well-wisher's curiosity, what do you do from here? You are not, I gather, and I mean no offense, a man of extensive fortune. How will this affect your life?"

The proximity of old, established wealth had given Captain Cobb, for the first time in his memory, a yearning for a future of security. Seated next to a clubman, a citizen of standing, he looked forward to his annual trek to Florida with the liveliest misgivings. All that, he concluded, was behind him. The candor of his reply was without parallel in the history of his conversation.

"Well, sir, I'd like to put my money out so as to have a little mite coming in regular. I've lived rough, and I've enjoyed it, but I'm in no ways as young as I was when I was younger."

"That is of course sound," agreed his companion. "From your nest egg of three thousand dollars, in this era of continuous war economy, you should reasonably expect to get from six to ten per cent, with the usual modest risk. Your return would then be about seventy dollars a quarter—enough, I should imagine, to finance those delightful trips to the South that you spoke of."

"More than enough, with what I ordinarily get my hooks on in a business way. Now see here, sir, your bank must have some such service as this. What do you recommend?"

Mr. Wycoff, laughing, held up both hands in mock horror. "My dear fellow, never ask a banker how to invest your money. He'll tell you to put it in government bonds."

"What would you do if you were in my place?"

Mr. Wycoff sat for a moment staring out into the dusk. He seemed to have gone back, in his thoughts, to a possible time when he, too, was struggling up the first rungs of the shaky financial ladder. At length, he slapped his knee again, this time in decision, and said, "I have a capital plan. We'll go along to my club and discuss your financial picture over a good dinner and a bottle of wine. Perhaps by the cigars we'll have a portfolio rigged up that will ease your affairs forever."

Captain Cobb protested feebly, saying that it was too much to expect and besides he wasn't dressed for elegant surroundings.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Wycoff. "We'll be honored to have a Cape Cod sea captain visit us for an evening. It might liven things up. We're stodgy and cautious—not quite but nearly everything they say about us in the books and the newspaper columns—but there's a little spunk left in us at that."

The chambers, in a lofty second story, somewhat removed from the range of accurately thrown bottles and stones, were discreetly luxurious, in an atmosphere of citadel hush and relaxation. In only one room, a darkly paneled bar, was talk and laughter normal, and here Mr. Wycoff introduced Captain Cobb to a number of his fellow bankers. While an accomplished actor, the Captain had ever found it difficult to simulate abashment. Accordingly, he gave it up and began to enjoy himself naturally. One of the most agile liars on record, he entertained the delighted membership with anecdotes so unlikely and flavorsome that nearly every man in the room tried to buy him a drink. Mr. Wycoff sat by with amused and proprietary pride.

Later, in the dining room, with unmistakable business skill, he ran down his list of currently favored equities, telling Captain Cobb, at the end, "There are those, there are tax-free bonds, which you don't want in your bracket, and there's bank stock. Each has its special merits and drawbacks."

"Bank stocks?" inquired Captain Cobb.

"The yield is uniquely high," said Mr. Wycoff, "but the risk has always been measured in proportion. It's a matter of individual temperament. Frankly, my family have lived on it, more or less, for

years."

"How high?"

"The stock of my bank, our bank, the Back Bay Farmers Trust & Fiduciary, has paid about twenty per cent for the past five years, slightly below that previously."

"Sold!" cried Captain Cobb, digging into his shirt and beginning to haul out bills by the double handful.

"Please!" whispered Mr. Wycoff in a desperate tone. He had turned several shades paler. "The sight of money at this table might earn me a six-month suspension. The rules are very explicit on the subject. No, no, it is quite useless. I doubt that there is a single share presently to be found on the market."

Captain Cobb's face betrayed such bitter disappointment that Mr. Wycoff said, after a moment's hesitation, "I'll tell you what we'll do. The evening is young—we'll just ride out to my office and look into the books." He smiled. "For some reason I'd like to think of you making those wildfowl flights to the South without worry."

Despite the black repute of bankers, contrary to the spirit of all the literature on this subject, Mr. Wycoff ended by selling Captain Cobb 75 shares from the portfolio of his wife, who owned 6750. It was a magnanimous gesture, and over a handsome leather-topped desk, in a stately marble palace, the two men solemnly shook hands.

"They'll be registered and sent down to you on Monday," said Mr. Wycoff. "And now, let us say good night. I trust that we can keep in touch from time to time."

At the door, as they shook hands again, the night watchman strolled up with his clock. "Glad to see you out, Mr. Wycoff," he said. "I hope you've been feeling better."

"Yes, yes, Henry," he replied, and to his visitor, "Goodby, Captain. Pleasant voyaging." He waved away the almost tearful appreciation and strode whistling down the sidewalk, making little leaps now and then in what appeared to be an effort to avoid stepping on the cracks.

With the definite commitment of his money, Captain Cobb no longer coveted a night at the Copley Plaza. A note of caution had been introduced into his financial outlook. How much better, he thought, to drop into Mac's and thus begin a strict, sensible budget.

The fine edge of his victory was gone. He was now a man of Property, and therefore anxious. He was, in fact, deathly afraid that somebody might come along and take it all away. His stock had been bought at the market, at 40½, and he could scarcely wait to see what Monday might bring in the way of improvement. Mr. Wycoff had advised him never to consider it again, to collect his dividends and keep an untroubled mind, but he had already begun to explore the heady stratosphere of Capital Gains.

He passed a restless night.

Back in Chatham, on Saturday, he found the dory business badly snarled. Somebody had taken one of the boats and left it in the Cow Yard, as a convenient way to avoid paying a possible collector upon its return. Uncle Veenie had rented the other dory to a Kansas couple, serenely confident, who had first let it go dry on a bar and had then broken an oar in their attempts to get it off.

For some reason during this day Captain Cobb fought his impulse to describe his crazy Friday in loving detail. At Uncle Veenie's shack he submitted to the usual chaffing about weekend indiscretions at the track. It was in his mind to explode their complacency with a couple of well-chosen sentences, but an unseen hand restrained him. By Monday noon, however, he had decided to take his rightful place among the gentry. He would broadcast the incredible fact of his solvency. In his imagination he dwelt with pleasure on the stupefied reaction of the town. Set against this desire was the inevitable annoyance of his being badgered for taxes. Well, he would stall until time to go to Florida. He could easily pay the head tax, which was nominal, but to do so was in violation of a principle and would destroy a seventy-one-year record of crystal purity.

~~Before~~ Before returning to the beach, after lunch, he stepped into the Mayflower with a kind of proprietorial gait and bought a newspaper. It was his aim to check on the probable advance of his securities. On page 1, however, set in a dismal green box, with a runover to page 47B, appeared an item that sent him reeling: "Back Bay Farmers Trust & Fiduciary Closes Doors; Official Quizzed by FDIC." Collapsing on a bench, he plunged on through the appalling news. A series of school bonds, long ago retired, having

been discovered among the active collateral, bank examiners had been quietly checking the position of the institution. In the run-over, which took Captain Cobb fifteen minutes to locate, being sequestered among the classified ads in a separate section, it was surmised that large-scale peculations were likely. At the moment, both the examiners and the agents of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation were closeted with Harley G. Wycoff, Chairman of the Board.

Tuesday's news was even less joyful. There remained little doubt that one of the craftiest swindles in banking history had gone forward within the quiet refinement of Wycoff's marble palace. By the simple expedients of substituting retired bonds for good ones and by removing a considerable number of deposit records entirely, someone (the newspapers were still careful to avoid implications of personal guilt) had reduced the bank to a pitiable fraction of its former worth. The doors would stay closed.

This intelligence was gloomy enough. Wednesday brought the crusher. Late in the afternoon a businesslike man with a pince-nez and a satchel called upon Captain Cobb at his homey establishment on the sand. The visitor was waved, not without trepidation, to a seat on the Captain's bench, the former property of Eastham, directly before the sign advertising side trips to Egypt. The man's expression revealed that he was accustomed to conferring in surroundings somewhat less relaxed.

"Captain Ezra T. (for Titweiler) Cobb?" he said, consulting a paper and clearing his throat.

"Wish to rent a nice boat?" said the Captain nervously. "Take a trip to the outer beach, or maybe go for flounders? Customer of mine, a haberdasher up to Lynn, brought in thirty-six pound of flounder only last Thursday—they were congregated over a mussel bed."

"I'm an attorney," said the man, producing a card that identified him as Merle Waxman, a servant of the state, a specialist in the laws of banking. "According to our records, you own, let me see, yes, 75 shares of stock in the Back Bay Farmers Trust & Fiduciary, Boston."

"There's still plenty of time to go for flounders," observed Cap-

tain Cobb.

"You may have noted that the bank has run into hot water. A situation has developed. At noon today, Mr. Harley G. Wycoff was taken into custody. A certain amount of the deposits will be recoverable under the Federal Deposit Insurance Act, but I fear that the bank will not reopen. Your stock, sir, is worthless."

Captain Cobb sat staring out in the general direction of Spain. He was trying to muster a feeling of outraged loss. To his surprise, there was an unhistorical vacancy of effect. The feeling didn't come.

"Well, it appears as how I'm broke again," he said at last, rather briskly.

"I wish it were that simple. Unfortunately, this particular stock of the Back Bay Farmers carries the provision for double jeopardy. You are, in short"—Mr. Waxman consulted his memorandum again—"liable for an additional sum of \$3124, including tax. Your check will be acceptable."

"My check! I haven't written a check since I was seventeen years old, and that one landed me in the county farm. I challenge the state's right to force me to write a check when I haven't got a bank account. It ain't ethical. I won't support it."

"Your assets are carried in fields of investment aside from institutions of banking? If you would care to give me a rough list, subject to our checking more minutely at a later date——"

"Let's see," said Captain Cobb, furrowing his brows over the dark glasses, "I can't say that I rightly own either one of the dories—they belong to my cousin Will—but the port oar in that smaller boat is mine, I picked it up on Morris Island, and the bucket is mine as well as the bilge scoops in both boats. If you're making a list, you might put down nine flounder lines, two quarts of quahaugs, these garments I'm wearing, and a change of shirt up to the house, a pearl-handled penknife, an old stump of a gaff, and a half bottle of Carter's Little Liver Pills. That represents the bulk of the assets, although there may be a few odd lots in plugs, feathers, and pyramid sinkers. If the state's so extreme destitute that it covets them, take the group and welcome. Let the depositors divide it up, else sell them for what you can get. However, I'll

have to slip into the water if you want the clothes."


"I see," said Mr. Waxman acidly. He drew a long sigh and stood up. "There will be a routine notification of your condition in a few weeks. For the time being, the official view will be that it's impossible to get blood out of a turnip. I wish you good day, sir."

"Hold on!" cried Captain Cobb as Mr. Waxman turned to go, after peevishly attempting to kick the sand out of his shoes. "Did, ah, did Mr. Wycoff make any statement?"

"He expressed the conventional regrets."

"What about the money?"

"He said he frittered away the money at the track."

□  □ □ □ The summer moved on toward the Fourth of July. The lazy old holiday, rich in picnic and concussion, brought its usual awareness of time slipping by. Everybody resolved to be more energetic. Captain Cobb had his first fugitive thoughts of Florida, without regret for his lost fortune. In the brief period of his opulence, he had missed the principal ingredient of his existence. Always, before, there had been the exciting prospect of treasure trove just around the corner. In itself it was a perfect pattern for living, the happy days spent prospecting for the end of the rainbow, the elusive shower of gold, real only in anticipation. These impressions were not conscious with Captain Cobb; he knew merely that, on this Fourth of July, he was pleasantly stimulated by his plan to raid several clam beds while the foolish citizens were merrymaking up to the town.

Unknowingly, too, Uncle Vecnie had been caught in the trap of his wealth. The big boat hung heavy on his conscience. He had made two trips to the outer beach with passengers, at a dollar a head, but then the Coast Guard had walked in and ordered him to buy six new life preservers. Moreover the knowledge of his pay-

ments was a nagging irritation in the back of his mind. For the first time since he could remember, he had a worry. But today, on the Fourth, he was preoccupied with other matters. The town was having its traditional celebration, and Uncle Veenie had been named head of a committee to provide fireworks. The expediency of this was plain when it was considered (as it was) that he had a customer in the fireworks business. He also had a customer in the war surplus business, and through the latter he had contracted for a job lot of outmoded Army explosives--rockets, flares, mortars, and lights, most of them unidentifiable except to an expert. However, the customer had obtained a promise from Camp Edwards to send a gunnery sergeant down to help, and a rackety time was expected.

"The town's in luck, and so they'll find," said Uncle Veenie to Good Samuel as they climbed the lane to Shore Road to watch the parade. "Heretofore, we've made out with sparklers, pinwheels, and such, and the element of surprise was lacking. I predict that we'll raise their hair before this evening's finished."

Bill and Myra and Joan watched the parade from the Morgans' side yard. Behind and below them the sea snapped and sparkled in the morning light, and lining the street before them the townsfolk and summer visitors awaited the advance contingents. It was early, nine o'clock; the shade was still deep beneath the poplars and elms. An inflated sun shone out of a cloudless sky, giving the neat white cottages a chalky glare, and a lot of people had put chairs in their front yards. Rounding the curve at Light Point, up the way, the American Legion band loosed on the soft inshore breeze the first faint um-pahs of "The Stars and Stripes Forever"; the marchers were now within view. The leading unit, a loose, unauthorized addition, consisted of a group of boys pelting each other with stones. One of them, in an overthrow, rattled a rock the size of a half brick off the sign at the Lawes House, and then a constable came running down the street and chased them all away.

It was a good parade. Dunbar's boatyard had put a new blue cruiser on a truck, where it looked a mile long, and a group of high school girls in jolly bathing suits bounced around in the cockpit, making everybody feel warm and glad. In ten years, Bill reflected, scarcely any power on earth could get them up on that eminence

in that garb in that light that magnified flaws and blemishes.

"I like the one with the red ribbon in her hair."

"Only because she noticed you," said Myra.

"She sat next to me at the movie one night. I held her popcorn while she took off her coat."

"You'll get a bad name around here."

Theme of the parade was the early settlement, and things went off splendidly except that the man picked to be William Nickerson had been busy with a jug since about seven o'clock and he and the Indians turned out to be even friendlier than anybody had hoped. Singing, clapping each other on the back, and spilling sacks of corn (maize) over the pavement, they slowed down the general progress. Bill watched Mr. Ebersol, the Baptist minister, wearing a frayed Pilgrim's costume, go back and remonstrate with them futilely. "See here, Joe, you'll have to straighten up. We'll never get down through the town." By now, Nickerson had chosen to confuse his role and was talking Indian. "White brother stealen wampum," he told the Reverend Ebersol. "Mattaquason wishem land back."

Thanks to Nickerson's genial influence, the Indian Mattaquason, a sachem who had been kind to the original settlers, got sick at the head of Andrew Harding's Lane. Not only the braves but Nickerson gathered round to offer sympathy, and advice. "Mattaquason need Bromo-Seltzer," one of them said, but the sachem pushed him away.

"Go on, Ed. Leave me alone."

"Mattaquason be a good Indian soon," suggested Nickerson reassuringly.

The explorations were recalled in a series of ingenious floats, the first of which, sponsored by one of the historical societies, was an excellent replica of a Viking galley. Manning the sweeps were some of the town's young fishermen, in what appeared to be informal Icelandic dress, ranging from an old bearskin that had formerly hung in Gorham's barn to a horned helmet owned by Mrs. Peterson, the teacher, whose mother had sung Wagner in a road-company opera. Samuel de Champlain's truculent visit to Stage Harbor was memorialized in a tableau that played down the

trouble with the Indians and concentrated on the pious devotionals of the Frenchmen. Champlain's inspirational idea, so ably preserved in his diaries—that of greeting Indians with “beads in one hand and a rope in the other,” to gather up valuable slaves—was ignored altogether.

The float carrying Captain John Smith presented no such problems but made capital of the terrifying shoals of Nauset, from which Smith, exploring down the coast from Plymouth, had recoiled in horror in 1614. A ripple of appreciation ran over the crowd at the appearance of the Pilgrim exhibit; no pains had been spared to give it verisimilitude.

“Now there's quite a thing,” said Joan.

“That's Herb Thurston down inside the suit of armor,” said Bill. “He's Miles Standish. I understand they had hell's own time getting the stuff on. People were rather smaller in those days.”

“He's itchy or something,” Standish indeed seemed to have developed an awkward irritation in the vicinity of his right buttock. His efforts to alleviate it—whacking himself with a metallic clang, jumping up and down, and sitting violently on the side of the float—were apparently unavailing.

“By the way, how did they scratch?”

“It's winter that always worried me,” said Myra. “When you think of walking around in all that cold iron. And in *England!*”

“Unquestionably they wore some kind of woolen drawers.”

“If they did, they had to scratch. It's a vicious circle. Any way you look at it, it's no fun being a knight.”

The float was symbolic in character, showing the Pilgrims aboard the *Mayflower* and staring at the shore of Provincetown, where already a Pilgrim's Monument magically arose, foreshadowing their arrival: the Pilgrims and the tribute to their feat, a baffling but graceful study in bending the Time factor, surpassing Dr. Einstein.

When the Harwich band came abreast them, playing “On the Mall,” Joan said, “Let's walk along beside it.” They went out of the Morgans' low trim gate and stepped down into the gutter, pleasantly exhilarated by the music. “The year I had the cornet I knew the names of lots of marches,” she added. “I like “The

Kilties' and 'Slippery Trombone' and 'El Capitán.' Do you know 'THE KILTIES'?" she shouted into the ear of the bandsman nearest her, a red-faced, middle-aged butcher blowing a clarinet. He shook his head.

"'THE KILTIES.' Scotch-sounding tune along the order of bagpipes. BAGPIPES."

The man lowered his clarinet for a moment and said irritably, "I'm busy."

"All right, all right, play what you please. It's your horn."

At the corner of Main Street they saw the Bensons, who climbed out of a parked convertible and joined them. Bill and Benson went on ahead, and passing Whitmore's Fruit Stand, they bought two lemons. "I always played this game when I was a kid," said Ross. "I've been whacked for it any number."

"Things have been quiet lately," said Bill. "To tell you the truth, I've been pretty eager to start something."

"Same here," said Benson. "I think we're on the right track."

"What the hell. Parades."

"Good parade, though," said Benson.

The Harwich band had now struck up "Under the Double Eagle," in midtown, where the crowds were thickest, and Bill and Benson began to suck on the lemons. Two trumpet players broke off first, and then a trombone and two piccolos followed after. The majority of the band were out of commission within a matter of minutes.

"Drop that lemon!" came an angry hiss behind Bill's ear, and he whirled around with a look of embarrassment.

"We were having a little fruit as we enjoyed the music."

"Drop that lemon!"

"I just bought it. I haven't got anything like all the juice out yet." The band leader, the proprietor of the Harwich Quality Market, a tall, thin man wearing a white shako, came bustling back from the front lines and inquired loudly what was going on. "Those fellows over there were eating lemons," said one of the trumpet players. "Our lips puckered up and went all to hell."

"I'm sorry," said Bill. "It was thoughtless."

"In the pig's eye!" came another hiss from Myra.

"Do you know 'The Kilties'?" asked Joan.

"Back in formation!" screamed the leader. "'Under the Double Eagle'! Pick it up at 16!" He sounded a blast on a silver whistle and scurried up to the front again.

Benson threw down his lemon in disgust. "A person could be dying of scurvy around here, and they'd go right on blowing 'Under the Double Eagle'!"

"I wish they'd play 'The Kilties,'" said Joan. "Always liked that tune. You remember, Bill. Time I had the cornet you came up to my room once when I was playing it. I remember you offered me twenty dollars to go to Sag Harbor for the week end."

"We've seen the parade," said Myra. "Let's get on home. We've got a picnic."

She looked into Bill's room just before noon. He was sitting on the side of his bed, pulling on a sweatsock. He was whistling and seemed cheerful, but he broke off and waved her to a chair.

"I thought that parade zipped right along," he said. "An improvement on last year somehow. Better bunch of Indians, for one thing."

"I was with it up as far as the lemons. I simply don't follow you. Why scramble everything?"

"The whole trouble was I misjudged that fellow with the fuzzy hat. I thought he'd be pleased. Anybody else would have been glad to take a fresh start. You saw how it was going—the bassoon jumped the gun. He was off and running long before the down-beat. He was young and strong, too; they'd never have caught him, never."

"Marjorie Benson says you've corrupted Ross to the point where he hasn't any respect for anything. She says he described *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as 'a left-wing tit-novel' and called her boss an 'oral plumber.' If you don't believe in Ernest Hemingway and dentistry, what do you believe in?"

"I've seen this coming with Benson," Bill replied slowly. "It's a process of looking backward, in the style of the Pre-Raphaelites. He's returning to Louisa May Alcott for his literary inspiration and to barbers for his tooth work. In any case, it's just a phase. It'll

pass."

"Marjorie asked me to go to Boston with her tomorrow. She's been invited to a 'sneak preview,' I believe she called it. What's that exactly?"

"It's a preview of a movie before a roomful of sneaks. I wouldn't get mixed up in it if I were you."

"Bill, we've got a few minutes before the picnic. If it isn't too much trouble, just what the hell is the matter with you?"

"I'm a member of the lost generation. I'm a jazz baby."

"I mean actually."

She came over and sat down on the bed beside him. "What was your father like? I went into this sort of thing for you. Now it's your turn."

"I told you before we were married. He had a general store in a town in Indiana, one of those little towns that spend their lives trying to be described as cities, with a dot and a circle on the road maps."

"Good town?"

Stretching out lengthways with his back against a pillow, he said, "I've thought about it some. Funny little town. A non-serious town. The absurdity of its pretensions long ago gave it a foundation of municipal mirth. Besides that, half the population's colored, and in my day they spent most of their waking hours laughing. So you see, there's a local school of humor."

"What's all that got to do with you?"

"This is where the deep psychological stuff comes in. It's a pity old Freud's passed on; he might have loved this—a case of regression minus the sex symbols."

"Don't be too sure."

"When things are make-believe, or funny, or mocking, I'm on solid ground. The minute they get real and serious, I freeze. If you're looking for a confessional, I mean."

"I noticed that long ago. But are you positive you've got the right reasons?"

"Leaving a place like that," he went on in a tone that suggested he was talking to himself, "you suddenly find yourself in a real world, and you try to turn back. But you can't do that if you have

to make a living, so you settle on an uneasy compromise. You'd be surprised and grieved to learn that the gay fellow with the ready quip is uncomfortable most of the time."

"Not me. I've known it for years."

He regarded her with interest. "Have you indeed? Maybe I've been overlooking you."

"That's not all you've overlooked. Let's go on a bit. How did Mama and Papa get along? The standard query."

"Badly. But then nearly everybody does. There are several ways of approaching the married life. Most common, of course, is Thoreau's 'quiet desperation.' Then you have the system of fierce and bloody fighting offset by overstimulated fornication—a grand method for those of easy conscience and hardy constitution. A third contender, and a happy one, is that of domestic bliss pickled in alcohol. Despite the preachers, it's a simple truth that, by staying slightly intoxicated, one can tolerate nearly anything. Here again, though, extraordinary stamina is a requisite."

"What a brilliant fellow you are, Bill. I'll bet you know more than all the psychiatrists put together, wouldn't you say?"

"Very possibly, my dear. Very possibly."

"It's a cinch you've got everything taped out about yourself. No room for a slip-up there."

"Yes, I've puzzled it through pretty carefully."

"It has a glamorous ring, too—laughing boy from the Land of Nod, adrift in a humorless world."

"You've been going to plays again."

"Your mother was ferociously religious, I think you said. How did that sit with the old man?"

"My 'old man,' as you vulgarly call him, hadn't any religion whatever, though as a matter of course he insisted that we all go to his church rather than hers, to assert his dominance. He wanted to be a very dominant fellow. The fact is, he spent his life in morbid terror that somebody would try to dominate him."

"Pleasant to all hands, I suppose."

"Outside the family circle a model of cordiality. Within, he was largely quiescent, like a played-out volcano, with intermittent bursts of temper and bullying."

Myra got up and lit a cigarette, then returned to the chair, crossing her legs.

"I suppose it was all rather beastly for your mother?"

"Not for a minute. She enjoyed her martyrdom. Actually, she stirred up much of the trouble simply through an inborn sense of irritation. She never knew it, but she thoroughly detested the male sex, its crudeness, its animality. Too many low oaths, too much hawking and spitting, and overweening attention to coarse fun. My mother never had an uninhibited good time in her life. In the back of her mind was always the fear that someone would violate the precepts of her backwoods training. In a way, it was a form of jealousy."

"Much hooch in the house? Dancing, dirty jokes, singing the old college songs into the wee hours?"

"Negative. And there's a fine point: not so much the frowning displeasure of the omnipotent Baptist Church—Mother never actually heard the sermons, you understand—it was simply a matter of claiming advantage, of cracking down because she was Right, in the local view."

"Well, the emphasis has shifted. Now she's the villain."

"Oh, there's no question of villainy. My father *did* have a taste for nondescript company, his habits were inelegant, he was born selfish and stingy, and he suffered from a cosmic unease. All in all, I suppose, he was the victim of smalltownitis, the small town with its unhappy prying eyes."

"Sex was dealt with frankly and wholesomely in the family circle?"

"It didn't exist. Sex was the horned tryant behind the outhouse, the muted sickness of the Older Boys' Conference. Consequently, the children developed an extraordinarily furtive interest in it rather early. Particularly those who, like me, matured somewhat late. Paradoxical but true."

"You might even say it assumed threatening proportions, that it cast its shadow long before the event?"

"A bit fanciful, but we can assume it."

"It's an engrossing story, Bill. Same as you said to me. How are you fixed for dreams? What nocturnal demons has Indiana left

behind?"

"I have two staples, the first a business of being in a college class that's far advanced. I'll never catch up, no matter how hard I try. That one's based on solid fact. The other, the great mystery, has me rushing to a fire with the local fire department. It's my job to leap off the truck and attach the hose to the hydrant. But it doesn't work; the fittings are of different size. The curious thing is I don't remember what happened to the fire, whether it went out, or the building burned down, or what."

Myra got up and snuffed out her cigarette. "As you once said, I've certainly enjoyed our little talk. And I don't think I've ever heard any of this before."

"You never asked me."

"I'll run along. We've got this picnic. Would you like to do me a favor?"

"Nothing's too much for an old friend."

"You might just re-examine those sex symbols. And, Bill——"

"I'm all ears."

"You couldn't be more wrong. It's only street talk."

On a Fourth of July, in Chatham, people pour in from all the nearby towns. Most of them come for pleasure, others for mischief. Before he left for the fireworks, Uncle Veenie removed the oars from his boats and stood them in a corner of the shack. He put another padlock on the door and locked both of his motors to the bar upon which they rested. Last year, a gang of motor thieves had stolen six outboards on the Fourth and had even gone so far, in one case of well-rusted clamps, as to saw out the transom of a cut-down dory. In that general fiasco, which recalled the golden days of ship pilfering, Captain Cobb had been the outraged loser of three flounder lines and a cranberry scoop he had lifted from a Beetle Cat in Crow's Pond. This year, having returned from his expedition after clams, he was taking steps to wreak vengeance.

"I'm not warning them off, I'm inviting them in," he told Uncle Veenie as he busied himself at his dories. "If there's one type of human person I can't tolerate, it's a thief, and particularly

those from out of town. This annual migration's an impudence in the first place. Why don't they buy their own fireworks?"

"It's a dangerous custom," agreed Uncle Veenie in his bland way. "The Selectmen of Eastham might waltz in here and take back their park bench."

"That's all well and good about that. What I'm coming at is this outside vandalism. It ought to be stopped. There's hardly pickings enough around here to keep the local residents going through the summer, let alone bringing in foreign competition. But I'll fix 'em yet."

Curious at last, Uncle Veenie left his little flotilla and waded over.

Captain Cobb had enjoyed an unusually productive day. During the slow, serpentine course of the parade, he had virtually stripped three carefully planted beds of little necks, leaving only the runts and the seedlings. He had chosen his sites with care, picking out markers that belonged to men who had done him some disservice or other in the past, usually a matter of reclaiming abstracted property. In addition, he had visited North Beach at dead low tide, and scratched up nearly two bushels of steamers, or about fifty-five quarts over the legal limit. Most of this produce he had sold at Henderson's, representing it as the acquisition of "a group of boys in my employ." The rest, divided among three small mesh bags, he was arranging on the thwarts of his boats, in full view. What kept this from being foolhardy, in the Captain's opinion, was a large, set ratttrap in the mouth of each bag. But these were only a part of his precautions, as he explained to Uncle Veenie.

"I'm hopeful they'll attempt to clamber in the boats from either port side or starboard. Stand back there!" he cried, raising a restraining hand. Uncle Veenie hopped nimbly out of the way, and Captain Cobb pointed to the bottom sand, faintly visible in the twilight beneath two feet of water. "I've got eight weasel traps down there, and unless my calculations are faulty, I ought to bag a Harwichporter or two well before midnight."

Uncle Veenie shook his head admiringly.

"I'm sorry to tell you they're out of season, Ezra," he said, making a little joke. "You can only take Harwichporters during the

months beginning with Z."

They went up the lane together, and Uncle Veenie joined his fireworks committee on the lawn of the Coast Guard station. Darkness fell swiftly as the streams of cars, directed by Constable Snow, rounded the point from both directions, looking too late for places to park. The town was full; people had been coming in since early in the afternoon. As to the natives and summer residents, all the picnics were over, the fishing fleet (in holiday bunting for excursions with the families of the owners) had returned to Nickerson's Wharf, and on the lawns of the cottages along the shore, from the Mattaquason to Minister's Point, the orange explosions of small fireworks peppered the summer air. Atop the Light tower, the reflectors had only just started to turn; their flashing glow looked dim and inconclusive to the crowd gathered below. But three miles out at sea, across the bay and the thin strip of Nauset, the cheerful blinking of the Pollock Rip Lightship gave reassurance of the watchful readiness for disaster.

To Uncle Veenie's surprise, Camp Edwards had come through with a gunnery sergeant, a thin, melancholy youth named Peters.

"It's a blessing you've arrived," Uncle Veehie told him, shaking his hand and pointing to the pile of moldy Army combustibles. "I haven't had overmuch connection with this type of material since the Spanish-American War, and that was over before I'd got any further up than Buzzards Bay."

"Kindly don't take the idea that I'm an expert," said Peters sourly. "I transferred to ordnance week before last."

"Well, it can't be helped. Don't worry about it, son. We'll just do our possible, and leave the rest to Providence. The main thing to remember is aim out to sea. I don't think we ought to drop anything of an incendiary nature on the town—it wouldn't be relished."

Under Uncle Veenie's good-humored direction, several Coast Guardsmen conveyed the fireworks, both civilian and Army, out to the crest of the point, where some frames and chutes had been erected.

"We've got a little dandy of a night for it," said Uncle Veenie, "though I wouldn't be astonished at a mite of fog later on. I

thought I heard the Stonehorse hooting."

"I'd planned to go into Hyannis and soak my pizzle," said Peters. "Fireworks are for kids."

"Watch sharp now!" cried Uncle Veenie, and he lighted a large pinwheel. A murmur of appreciation ran over the spectators; then they applauded warmly. Their reaction was even more marked at the next exhibit, which was an object Peters withdrew from the Army pile, placed in a chute, and touched off. With a horrendous "WHOOSH," it rose in a green and blue streak, leveled off at about a thousand feet, and dropped abruptly into the sea near the Pollock Rip ship, where it exploded in a shower of purple balls and water. A series of angry hoots followed immediately.

"Great Jumping Jehosaphat! What was that?" cried Selectman Crowell, who was standing beside the public telescope, not far away.

"I anticipate that it was a signal of some variety," called out Uncle Veenie, beaming.

"Request for air support," was the brisk explanation of Peters, who had taken heart from his near miss on the lightship. "Either that or Fall Back for Barrage."

The hour that followed will remain forever fresh in the annals of Chatham fiestas. At its best it was a tribute supreme to those barefoot patriots whose somewhat lesser racket had started all the trouble; at its worst, nobody held out any serious hope for the town. As the *New Bedford Standard-Times* observed in next day's editorial: "This was no imitation. It was, rather, warfare in microcosm, and the celebration transcended the Fourth of July. It was a salute to the invention of gunpowder."

After Uncle Veenie had sprayed the bay with a number of incandescent but harmless Roman candles, Peters selected a mortar-like item that, once fired (with an intensely satisfying roar), apparently solicited the notice of a vessel just over the horizon. In any case, the sky some distance out at sea became suddenly alive with lights, and a thunderous splash was heard off Nauset.

"They're shooting back!" screamed Selectman Crowell. "For God's sake, hold it up!"

Peters concerned himself with the firing shell, stating that, "I

got a good fix on those lights. By correcting two degrees left we ought to drop the next one right on them."

"It's all right, folkses," called Uncle Veenie, 'holding' up both hands in a soothing gesture. "They aren't shooting. It's just rocket flares—I've seen them before."

A flurry of activity on Nauset Beach diverted everyone's attention for a moment. The beach buggies, those mobile fishing camps, were returning to Orleans, presumably bent on escaping from what had turned into No Man's Land. Their pin-point headlights were seen wildly zigzagging, and their motors were heard gunning desperately as the oversized tires spun in Nauset's loose sand.

The sight had a peevisish effect on Peters.

"Now what's the matter with them? Why don't they wait till they're hit before they holler? We haven't come within a country mile of those cars, and we aren't apt to, unless the wind changes."

"They've been over there fishing," said Uncle Veenie superfluously. "I misdoubt if the fish are biting, so they're going home. I've caught many a nice bass over there at night," he added with a companionable smile.

The crowd was calmed by a round of ingenious candles and pin-wheels, of which one of the latter sputtered its fiery way into a portrait of George Washington, but Peters' next selection reopened the offshore battle. From a strictly fireworks standpoint, it was a brilliant exhibit—a high, blinding rocket that soared over the dark ocean, hung up at the top of its arc, disintegrated with a crash, and released a miniature parachute, plainly seen in the after-glow.

"How do you like that? A first-aid kit!" shouted Peters with excusable pride, but his words were lost in the sharp bark of multiple pop poms.

"Confound those fellows! They're shooting at it with anti-aircraft! What's the matter with them—they Russians or something?"

A sudden "bop, bop, bop, bop" of spent shells landing in the water near the Pollock Rip was answered by the lightship's one-pounder. Seconds later an unfestive rocket screamed up from the Coast Guard station, and the blinker on the Lighthouse balcony

rattled into action. •

Uncle Veenie had just expressed his glee at this gesture of holiday solidarity when a Coast Guard yeoman sprinted into view. He was carrying a message neatly folded in an official envelope. •

"Thank you, son," said Uncle Veenie courteously; then, peering closer, he observed, "Aren't you Bethlelea Freeman's son? From East Orleans? I don't call your name right out. It's getting so I can't keep track——"

"You'd better read it, sir—right away," gasped the boy.

Even in the stress of emergency, the communication was properly arranged and dispatched. Uncle Veenie admired the neat lettering and the military style.

TO: Town fireworks committee
FROM: Commandant, Coast Guard Station
VIA: Direct by hand

ENCLOSURES: None

1. It is known that there exists international tension, c. "jitters."
2. A Yugoslavian freighter is offshore.
3. The average Yugoslavian has never heard of the Fourth of July.
4. Your Army surplus materials have opened hostilities between Yugoslavian freighter and Pollock Rip Lightship.
5. It is requested that you cease fire immediately.
6. Acknowledge.

"Oh, now, son, there isn't any need for all this fuss," said Uncle Veenie. "You run back and tell Mr. Griswold we haven't got the means here to injure a mouse. It's nothing but a collection of pretty lights and baubles. As to ringing Yugoslavia in on it——"

"I think we ought to make an official reply, for the record," said Peters nervously. "And send him one of these identical rockets so we'll have proof we were in the clear. Give me that paper."

On the back, he printed:

TO: Commander Griswold, USCG
FROM: Sgt. Herman T. Peters, U.S.A.
VIA: Direct by hand.

ENCLOSURES: 1 Mark 3-B Army field rocket (with first-aid kit).

1. Regard to the Yugoslavian freighter offshore near Chatham.
2. They fired first.
3. All materials in hands of fireworks committee practically harmless unless sustaining a direct hit.
4. Call attention to ordinary fireworks causing injuries each year.
A. Reference: Newspaper stories on Fifth of July.
5. Respectfully request permission to carry on with celebration while deleting larger mortars and attempting to avoid future direct hits.
6. With best wishes for interservice co-operation.

(H. T. Peters)

"That ought to cover it," said Uncle Veenie. "It's as pretty a job as I've seen in years. You've done it handsome—I wouldn't be surprised to see you get a promotion. WE'RE ALL READY, FOLKSES," he continued in a louder voice, raising his hands again. "WE JUST HAD A NICE MESSAGE FROM MR. GRISWOLD."

His advice was received with mixed cheers and groans, there evidently being some opinion that the next exhibit might touch off the sack of Chatham. But the careful choice of sparklers and colored lights that followed put everybody in an easier humor. During this period, Peters interpreted a lack of reply from Commander Griswold as a tacit pat on the back. He fished around in the troublesome pile and came up with a handful of small and rather innocuous-looking rockets. The first one, exploding in emerald splendor, was plainly a signal. The second, a "bit of a mystery" to Peters, wound up an ominous, hissing ascension with a gigantic puff which flung a ball of whirling fire into the sea a hundred feet astern of the beleaguered lightship. Again the angry hooting, this time coupled to a complaining wail.

"Correct your range," sang out Uncle Veenie with friendly holiday spirit. "No harm done."

Peters aimed the next one lower, and it discharged its red spit-ball inside the Bay, whereupon the last straggler of the beach buggies revved up to maximum speed, slipped, skidded, clawed its

way into a sand dune, and disgorged its occupants, whose faint curses rose over the buzz of general confusion. His third rocket, also well within the Bay, drew an answering signal—a high white light—from another spot over the horizon, and his fourth landed in Uncle Veenie's cruiser.

In the quick hubbub of alarm and dismay, Commander Griswold himself burst into the group, shouting, "Stop it at once! A Norwegian oiler thinks you're in trouble and has signaled, 'Am on way to aid you.' The fog's blowing up and she'll get in trouble sure."

Thus ended Chatham's great Fourth of July celebration. Dawn, breaking over the beach, revealed an essentially melancholy scene. Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb, viewing the charred bones of the *Bertha T.*, discussed the catastrophe.

"Say what you please," remarked Uncle Veenie, "Nova Scotia cedar'll burn when your average boat remains waterlogged. It's a matter of quality."

"Insured?" inquired Captain Cobb.

"Fully covered in the contract. This releases me from a ticklish pinch. To come right out with it, I wasn't prepared to meet the next payment. More than that, I was never entirely at ease about those extra cushions. No, it was providential in more ways than one."

Captain Cobb stepped into his smaller dory. "I thought I'd drop down with the tide and watch them haul the Norwegian oiler off the bar. Care to come along for the ride?"

"No," said Uncle Veenie. "No, thank you kindly. I promised I'd appear and help get Sergeant Peters out of the guardhouse. I thought it was the least I could do."

it was (un having a secret life, even if it must be lived mostly in little hurried notes like these, guilty scraps of paper tucked into a pillow, but I find as I write you now in midsummer that it becomes harder and harder not to touch your hand when we are with the others, to keep from putting my arm around you when we're playing in the water, to free my mind of your lovely young——"

Sitting in her room, in the late morning, with the Chinese glasses tinkling in the quick drafts of a gusty day, Myra read the hateful words. She went on from phrase to embarrassing phrase, a familiar throb beginning over her eyes, the devoted forerunner of the dark and mysterious spells. When she finished, she sat for a moment, as she had done often before in the three years past, until, now, the mocking note of the chimes released a long-dammed flood of accusation. She sprang up and seized a golf club whose frayed thread she had glued and went swiftly into the hall and smashed the glasses. She broke each noisy prism as it swung to the breeze and then broke them again, two or three times, powdering some to bits, as they lay on the floor. Souvenir of Okinawa. Home, the hunter, from the shores of Gitche Gumeé. On the day of his return, she had brought out baby sister, a pink grotesque of knobs and tassles. Lagniappe for a Navy League elopement.

She heard her come into the kitchen, the lovely young voice floating melodically up the stairs.

"Knock it off, Allie. I know you're hiding somewhere."

"Alice has gone shopping," said Myra, descending.

"You're up, then."

"What is it you're after—a whiskey sour?"

"I thought I'd just eat me a doughnut."

"You do have an appetite, don't you?"

"It hasn't lost me any friends."

"The doughnuts are gone. How do you feel about a pickle?"

"It doesn't seem to stir me. I'll let you know."

Passing each other with studied indifference, their eyes met briefly and an awareness, an electric understanding, passed between them. Joan thought, She's noticed something. I've done it again.

Myra hesitated a second at the door, on the point of making vocal the tension of three years, but the preposterous surrender of her advantage to a juvenile and a pensioner was too steep a price. When she had it out, it would be before the full company, and final. Payment deferred. She waged a little battle with her better nature, and, winning, said, "Your blouse is filthy—you'd better go change it. And put on a brassiere."

"Oh, this is only my fishing blouse," replied Joan with good-humored insolence. "There's no need."

"Change it before you leave. And put on your fishing brassiere."

"I dislike being vulgar, and it's been established that puberty is vulgar," said the girl, "but I have to tell you that I've outgrown them all. Every last one. Like the State Department, your policy of cautious containment has proved a little conservative."

"There's something about you, Joanie, an air of overripe brightness, that's beginning to sicken me slightly."

"You mustn't blame yourself. Up at school they tell me I'm a genius. I put all the blocks together. They had this intensely nasty little psychiatrist with the bald spot and the sexy eyes, and he went around tapping skulls. When the polls closed, it seemed I was the only genius in the joint."

"We must remember that it's a very small school. Now go do what I said."

The girl regarded her with spacious contempt, then went on up the stairs, waving a languid arm. "It's all right, darling. I yield to the crack of the master's whip. Immobilized: one competitive bosom."

Myra swallowed a wave of nausea and went out into the yard, into the sun and sharp weather. As she walked down the path to the sand, the tightness in her stomach eased slowly and the caught blood in her temples retreated before the force of the wind. Then she noticed Bill coming around the point in the inboard. He had Captain Cobb and Uncle Veenie with him and was towing the dinghy. Seeing her, he waved with grand enthusiasm, calling out, "We're going up to South Orleans. Want to come along? It's wet." She shook her head no, but Joan, standing above her on the bank, yelled, "Hold on—I do," and skipped down to

the shingle and out into the shallow water, carrying her shoes in her hands. By pulling up her skirt to an indecent level, she was able to reach a depth at which they took her directly into the boat, and avoided putting out the tender. She rolled expertly over the rail and they were off in a hoarse burst of acceleration, making a series of steep, alternating turns to clear a sunken whale-boat, the McKees' mooring, and the one big troublesome rock, treacherously submerged at high tide.

It was a brisk day for boating. When they emerged from the lee of Strong Island, a relentless head wind sent long rollers dashing against the bow, with flying foam and weed. Bill put up the hood and cut down their speed and they bobbed painfully on past the golf course and toward Camp Viking.

"I favor bracing conditions for an outing," said Uncle Veenie, who was standing with a cheerful look, thoroughly drenched, abaft the motor box. He spat out a mouthful of salt water and shook his head with a smile. "This is as good as a tonic to me—I wouldn't have missed it."

Huddled on a fold-seat in the shelter of the hood, Joan said to Captain Cobb, crouched beside her, "What's the matter with him? Is he trying to commit suicide?"

"He's pondering the reward."

"What reward?"

"Dr. Harvey's catboat's gone adrift. He's stood out for ten dollars and the remainders of a bottle of partially used whiskey in the locker to anybody that recovers it."

"The boat isn't worth ten dollars. You could spit through the hull almost anyplace. This is the best thing that ever happened to Dr. Harvey."

"You tell him that," said Captain Cobb. "Speaking personally, I don't think there's any likelihood of his passing out the money, but if I see the boat I aim to take possession of the whiskey."

"Look sharp, now!" cried out Uncle Veenie. "I surmise it's hung up in the weeds along here somewheres."

Joan cupped her hands over her eyes and stared through the whistling spray. "There's a boat over there toward the Orleans Flats, farther down—no, it's a dory with people in it. My lord, it's

got four or five families in it, and several servants."

Captain Cobb refused to turn his head, but Uncle Veenie made an inspection.

"It's Ezra's. It's the one he rented out this morning. Let's see, now, yes, it's carrying six adults, two children, and a dog. The water's right level with the gunnels. Offhand, and meaning no offense, I'd say this was a case for the police."

"They're afloat, ain't they?" growled Captain Cobb. "The man affirmed that he could row, and I didn't argue. He said they'd row right over and have a nice picnic. Time they get there, they'll have brine sandwiches, salt meat, and pickled eggs. But it's of no account to me—I disclaim responsibility."

"They're stranded on the flats," observed Joan, as Uncle Veenie lifted his hands in a gesture of disbelief. "Why, they may not get back till after dark."

"If they keep the boat past eight o'clock," said Captain Cobb, "they'll owe for another day. House rule." From some inner recess of his windbreaker he withdrew a fresh cigar, shiny in its cellophane cocoon, and managed to light it by disappearing into his garment like a turtle. He came out puffing serenely, and stole a contented look at his laboring dory. It was a good stout craft, "all boat," in the local parlance, and he had few fears for the safety of his clients. At the moment of rental, one glance had convinced him that the man, an obvious off-Caper, had no business rowing in such a tide, and he easily foresaw an all-day drift with its consequent doubling of the tariff. The summer of late had been progressing to suit him. He felt keen and zestful, competent to exploit any customer who appeared to have surplus cash. The spirit of artistic larceny does not thrive on an independent income. All but vanished was the black memory of his moment of sedentary affluence. Somewhat paradoxically, he now felt emotionally free to continue his search for wealth.

Uncle Veenie also was restored to full mental balance. His many friends remarked that they had never known him in sunnier humor; the magnetic warmth of his good nature drew people down to the shack. It was a prime loafing spot for the rich and the poor, for children and dogs, for Old Residents and Summer

Visitors. It was, perhaps, the only place in Chatham where the twain met without restraint. His energies again were concentrated on his skiffs, his source of steady income, but his life was sweetened by the knowledge, common to all who live by the sea, that the ocean floor would one day deliver up its treasures into his lap.

Today the boats were rented, all eleven of them, representing a theoretical increment of twenty-two dollars and an actual take of around fourteen, counting the clients who would land elsewhere and decamp, those who would stay out purposely until he had gone home, and one or two who would claim non-fulfillment of contract, maybe splitting an oar or driving a leak in the hull. It was a living, sufficient to meet his wants, and for the special needs, such as his present desire—to buy another secondhand motor—something would always Turn Up. It was so with Captain Cobb. He was, just now, sourly optimistic that the fifteen dollars he required to propitiate the butcher would be in his hands before nightfall. This was not merely wishful; each in his fashion had a childlike faith in the sea. It was the secret of their long success.

"Rocks around here," said Bill, slowing down.

"The channel sets off to the right," called Uncle Veenie. "Just fix your eye on the empty Coast Guard shack and steer around that little whirly rip."

Approaching the end of the bay, at South Orleans, the waves flattened out, the wind being screened off by the shore-line trees. The missing sailboat was nowhere to be seen. They anchored in shoal water and went in to the beach by dinghy, making two trips. By now, Bill had been a Chathamite so long that he fell prey to the regional xenophobia. While afloat, their status had been harmlessly defined; the trivial act of coming ashore had established them as spies. He felt the same unease, a sense of being in atmosphere subtly sinister, he once had felt after crossing into Juarez from El Paso. The faces of two or three fishermen were set in suspicious lines, conveying greetings like those of the early Chatham folk when the crews of wrecked ships had landed.

"It's you, is it, Ezra Cobb?" said one of the men. He turned to his partner. "You better lay those oars up on the bank, Joe, and

tether your dog alongside."

"Oh pshaw!" said Captain Cobb. "That kind of smart-aleck talk won't get you anywhere, Abner Stevens."

"He's coming over your way, Joe. Take your wallet and stick it in your shirt front, and then lay down on it."

Nudging Joan, Bill whispered, "Friendly, aren't they?"

Captain Cobb strode regally up the beach and surveyed the scene, as Cortez must have done when standing on the peak at Darien. His attitude of bland proprietorship was apparently transmitted to Stevens, who cried to his companion, "He's a-going to stake it out and claim it. Run up and fetch the First Selectman, quick!"

Uncle Veenie, having lingered to place the dinghy in exact position for the high-slack tide (a fetish derived from his ceaseless manipulation of eleven anchored skiffs), now stepped gracefully across the pebbly sand, adjusting his cap.

"Afternoon, Abner, afternoon, Josiah."

Stevens nodded reluctantly and Joe uttered a sound resembling "Haree?"

"Tolerable," said Uncle Veenie. "Only tolerable. We're searching for a drifted-off cat belonging to Dr. Harvey, up to the Old Harbor Inn. I reckon you fellers haven't seen it, have you?"

Stevens' reply, baffling precise interpretation, was to screw up his face in such a way that it looked both negative and affirmative. He was, in brief, noncommittal.

"Oh, you won't get anything out of them," said Captain Cobb. "Likely they've found it and sold it. I'll wander down the line and search for myself."

When he was gone, Uncle Veenie said, "The boat was worthless as a vessel. Dr. Harvey was anxious to recover it for firewood. He's offered a two-dollar reward."

A slight twitching of a cheek muscle revealed that Stevens' interest was mildly excited.

"I'd be willing to go halves with any parties reporting its whereabouts. Dollar and dollar, and you couldn't hope to get fairer, seeing as I'll deliver the boat."

Stevens snorted. "Yes, indeedy. I'm convinced you would. The

finding parties do all the work of recovering, towing into Hobson's Cove and mooring, and you collect equal shares. Well, you've misjudged Orleans. You'll divide on a basis of 'fifty cents and a dollar and a half—I won't relinquish possession for a penny less."

Uncle Veenie shrugged in defeat, then he brightened up.

"Amen," he said. "Be it so. I knuckle under and hold no grudge. The Stevenses were always noted folk for close bargains. Take your blood money and welcome." He produced an elongated goat-skin purse, an inheritance from his grandfather, swung around to conceal his groping, and then handed over a watery dollar bill and a tarnished fifty-cent piece. As he was replacing the purse, a gigantic lobster claw slipped out of his jacket pocket. It bounced with a dull crack off the stones, and he swooped down on it, thrusting it back out of sight.

"Grit and damnation!" cried Stevens. "Where'd you get that claw? I haven't seen a Bay lobster like that in ten years. You found a new piece of wreckage?"

Uncle Veenie appeared nettled. "Nowhere," he said. "Or nowhere I'd care to mention. When lobsters come along that go fourteen to sixteen pounds, best thing to do is praise the Lord and mistrust all others."

"I didn't know you was lobstering this summer," said Stevens with a keen look.

"I set two pots out, but I had to give it up. Hauling them over the side placed kinks in my back and seemed to goose up my kidneys."

"Then why in the name of thunder do you mind telling where it came from?"

"I'd let you know in a minute, Ab, only it isn't good business," said Uncle Veenie with a smile. "Come cooler weather and I may be lobstering again."

"Yes, and they may be gone. See here, you say where you took that lobster, and I'll return your dollar and a half. Now what more do you want?"

Uncle Veenie shook his head. "You wouldn't be satisfied, Abner. Might be, you'd have a run of bad luck, and you'd blame it all on me. No, I wouldn't care to risk it."

"Two dollars," said Stevens, "and not one blessed cent more." Uncle Veenie sighed, turning the enormous red claw over and over in his hand. Suddenly he came to a decision. "Do you promise right out in the presence of witnesses that there won't be any grumbling or backbiting? Final seal of sale on delivery of information?"

"You name the spot," said Stevens, proffering the two dollars, "and I'll do the rest. I don't calculate I need lessons to catch shellfish, granted there's any around."

"Well," said Uncle Veenie, pocketing the money, "that lobster was taken not more than two miles—it couldn't hardly be any more convenient—out from Camden, Maine. My wife's cousin sent it down. There's a rocky shelf juts off to the left and partially in front of the——"

"You infernal Scrabbletown skinflint! For two pins, I'd——"

"Be seeing you, Abner," cried Uncle Veenie heartily. "Remember me to your mother, Joe."

Captain Cobb hove into view as they hastily pulled up the dinghy. His expression was less than ordinarily acidulous, and his gait was jaunty. All things considered, he had made a profitable journey. A quarter mile down the beach, idly alerted for loose objects of value, he had seated himself on a small, recently painted Amesbury boat and mopped his peeling face with a handkerchief. He was thus occupied, the lone celebrant in a sandy Elysium, when a vacationer wearing a frightful hand-painted shirt came out of the trees near the road. "I'm glad you showed up," he said. "I was here before, looking at the boat."

Captain Cobb gave a restrained nod and maintained a carnivorous scrutiny.

"Wife and I and the kids are on foot to Provincetown and I thought I'd pick up a little something to fool around in on the Bay. We stopped several places."

"Boats are nice to have," stated Captain Cobb, "especially when you're out on the water."

"I'm funny," said the man. "I might go along and look at seven hundred boats in a row, and then all of a sudden I'll see one that just hits me, and by George nothing else will do. I don't know why

—it's just the way I am."

Captain Cobb produced a short, grating laugh in sympathy with this winning trait, and then, for some reason, said, "Me, too."

"To get right to the point," continued the vacationer (interjecting that he was never much of a one for "horsing around" at business), "I've taken a shine to that little craft of yours, and the wife is just as crazy about it as I am."

"Amesbury built. She's all boat," agreed the Captain with conviction, and he added truthfully, "I don't know as I've ever had a better."

"Now if I wanted to play things smart, I'd run it down a little—you know?—but that's never been my way. I've got this darned honesty, can't help it—I'd probably be a rich man today if I didn't—and I might as well tell you the truth—I like that boat."

"Honesty is the best policy," announced Captain Cobb, sensing a vague possibility of literary theft.

"Look, I'd like to have this boat, but I'm allergic to haggling, so I'll just make you an offer that when you think it over you'll have to admit it's fair. I'll give you twenty dollars for the boat."

Captain Cobb stirred uneasily. "I don't know as I ought to sell it. Fresh painted and all."

"Thirty dollars, throw in the anchor and rope."

The Captain stood up with an air of annoyed confusion.

"You're making this uncommon difficult for me——"

"Thirty-five dollars, anchor, rope, cushions, help load it on my car, and that's my very last word. You can ask anybody that knows me—once I've made a decision, I'll stake my very honor on keeping it. It's the way I am, and always have been."

Captain Cobb shrugged, mastered a brief last tug of conscience, and said, "Where's your car?"

Coming up the beach, a few minutes later, he waved to the others and clambered into the tender with dignity. So far as he could see, he was entirely in the clear. It might even be said that, in a reverse sort of way, he had been victimized—money thrust on him over his staunch but futile protests. Still, he had the restless feeling that an obtuse minion of the law might view things with characteristic bias, and he shot a covert look over his shoulder.

"If you'll drop me off in Hobson's Cove, Billy my boy, I'll return Dr. Harvey's cat," said Uncle Veenie. "I've got a fair wind and a fair tide, so we'll skip right along like a grasshopper. Would you care for a sail, Ezra?"

"Why, no, I believe not," replied Captain Cobb. "I've got some chores to attend to. On the whole, I'd better stick to the speedier boat."

Transferring to Dr. Harvey's collection of firewood, and handing over the Captain's whiskey, Uncle Veenie summed up the day. "It didn't pan out bad, though it wasn't anything sprightly in the commercial way. Orleans is worth about one visit a summer, maybe two. There's a tightfisted outlook up here that kind of throws a damper on business. Everybody's out to do you. When you come right down to it, I'm durned if I don't prefer Harwich."

"It's the same everywhere," said Captain Cobb philosophically. "There's a fundamentally vicious streak in the human animal. You take most of them, they treat me like something that was planning to steal their young. Perhaps it's best expressed in the Good Book: 'I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me'—Luke 7:19."

"I thought that was from Psalms," said Joan. "What version of the Bible do you use?"

"As a customer of fifty-cent hotels, I've been partial to the Gideon. Look lively, now. Don't scrape the paint. Swing your stern around and let's get back to civilization. I've got a hunch I've overstayed my welcome."

On August first the Association at Buzzards Bay announced the winners of the midsummer Striped Bass Derby. Captain Ezra Cobb, with his stunning entry of 57½ pounds

(the antique pinned in a tidal slough), shaded the next best catch, that of Leander Basset, of South Yarmouth, by a pound and a half. A whopping banquet was also announced for the coming Saturday. The town would be decorated and the winners feted in style, with a program of speeches, athletics, and demonstrations by the lucky anglers. This last item threw a monkey wrench into the caustic meeting of felicitations at Uncle Veenie's shack.

"You can make a few casts," said the latter to Captain Cobb, who was sitting by morosely. "They'll want to see how you did it. Between now and then you can borrow a bass rod and maybe get a book and read up. I know a feller that learned that way."

"I never cared for it," replied Captain Cobb. "Since I was a boy on these beaches, I've steered away from bassing. I never cared to place the strain on my heart."

"Well, you'll have to think of something, Ezra," said Bill. "If you don't show up, they may take back the car."

They sat on the smooth plank seat in the shade of the awning, digging their feet in the sand. The weather had been blowy, but the sharp east wind had swung around to the south, bringing the smoky haze so familiar on that side of the Cape, the memento of collisions between the soft south breeze and the icy North Atlantic. Overhead, a persistent sun struggled to burn things back to normal.

Conversation lagged as the fishing fleet, noisy with diesels, knocked its way back into the Bay and up toward Nickerson's Wharf.

Two or three boats still had kipper sails flying in the stern, used mostly for steadying boat as the lines were run, but useful, too, while coming home on a fair wind. The Perregeaux twins had killed all power and were riding the tide beam-to, cutting fish, piling cod livers in the separate tub, coiling trawls, and swabbing down decks with dipped-up bucketfuls of salt water. A cloud of screaming gulls followed in their wake, gorging on fish heads and entrails.

"They're back late today," Joan said.

"They have to keep probing farther to find fish," said Uncle Veenie. "Once upon a time, the waters were aswarm hereabouts. The money's gone out of it, too. And the risks have doubled. You

run a danger of sudden tempests venturing that far in such a boat. Sometimes it's the fish that gets fed, instead of the humans. But there again, that's nature's way. Two Chatham boats were lost during the past winter." •

"On top of all that, they're gouged on the price," said Bill. "I've always wondered why they didn't do something else."

"Chatham men will fish," said Uncle Veenie, explaining.

Captain Cobb sprang to his feet with a cry of joy. "I've got it! I don't know why I didn't think of it before. I'll splint up one arm and make as if I'd broke it. It's legitimate, too, in a way—I've got an elbow that's racked me for a full week. I skinned it pulling a lobster pot of Gould's, to see if bait was needed."

Everybody agreed that it was the very thing, and Saturday afternoon, when Bill and the others picked him up at the foot of Andrew Harding's Lane, he was attended with full surgical honors.

"Dr. Brokaw did the job. I concluded to invest two dollars in the presentations. I can peddle some little something—a fender or a headlight—and get it back later. How dee do, ma'am," he said to Myra, who was sitting in the back seat, looking uncomfortable. She felt shy with them, and was upbraiding herself for coming. Let Joan entertain his fishing friends. They probably spoke about the same language, boisterous, ribald, insensitive, the things she deplored in her husband's recent character. It promised to be an exhausting and fretful day. Could she not, simply by saying she had a head—

"I'll just slip in back here beside you, ma'am," said Uncle Veenie, making way for the hero. She started to speak, and then sat back, undecided. In the front seat, Joan, sliding across toward Bill, inadvertently lost her balance and tumbled half into his lap, putting a hand down to steady herself. He glanced at her with an intimate smile, and Myra felt the freezing pain of accustomed tension. For a second Uncle Veenie's expression of aimless and all-embracing benevolence altered just perceptibly, a momentary infusion of deeper color showing in his candid blue eyes.

"I'm not crowding you, am I, ma'am?"

Myra pulled herself back from the transfixion. She smiled and shook her head.

"It's squirmish riding when somebody's crowding you. Rudeness

don't bount, neither does it pay to let it go on too long."

Must he continue babbling? It was impossible to respond to the maundering of this senile old man when——

"My old granddaddy, he that had the grist mill down by Stage Harbor, used to contend that if folks were crowding you, or they coveted what you owned, the only thing to do was display spunk. That were his word—spunk. You'll never get anywhere with vapors, he used to tell us. The ones they admire are the spunky ones. I can hear him say it, sitting in his pew in the starboard chimney corner, summer and winter, fair weather and foul. He weren't much of a hand to get out in his later years," Uncle Veenie added.

She turned around slowly and regarded him with a thoughtful look. Uncle Veenie nodded, then he took from his jacket a bottle with a faded and indistinct label.

"Seeing we had a celebration, I thought I'd utilize this flask of rum dating from the First World War. If you don't mind, that is."

"I don't care if I do."

He drew the cork and let about half a gill of the dark liquid bubble into a folding tin cup. He handed it over, and she tossed it off without any slight facial change; nevertheless, she had the feeling that a hot fuse had burned its way down to her stomach and exploded a large powder magazine.

"It may be a mite weak, after all these years," suggested Uncle Veenie.

"The stuff's been cut. It's insipid."

"You'll do, ma'am. Indeef you will. I might remark that you'd have been a prime favorite with my old granddaddy."

"Let's try and forget your old granddaddy. He's a bore. He ought to get out more. Sitting around all day in a chimney."

"In the chimney corner. What I meant was——"

She helped herself to another drink of rum and, handing the bottle back, said, "You needn't apologize for your granddaddy, you know. Let him fight his own battles. It's time he stood on his own two feet."

Bill turned around and said, "What's going on back there?"

"He claims his granddaddy can lick my granddaddy."

"I decided I'd just bring this old rum along," explained Uncle Veenie.

"You know what," said Myra, leaning forward. "Your Uncle Veenie's a delightful fellow. Has a bad case of ancestor worship, but that's the Chinese in him. Where were we?"

"You were expressing a desire to meet some of my relatives," said Uncle Veenie.

"You see?"

They gave Captain Cobb a drink to pep him up and restore his color, Uncle Veenie remarking that he looked "liverish." His spirits revived and he talked with great animation through crowded Harwichport, in and out of Dennisport and South Yarmouth, and down the Mid-Cape Highway. He had on his white yachting cap and dark spectacles, a nearly white "windbreak," and a pair of English slacks he had stolen from his cousin, who was currently bed-ridden (and, as Uncle Veenie observed, would likely remain bed-ridden unless he had another pair of trousers). For adornment, for reasons best known to himself, he had affixed to his jacket an iron cross his cousin had lifted from a deceased German after the Battle of the Marne. Altogether, Bill decided, he looked uncommonly rakish. He had style. It was built into his carriage, the neat but reckless arrangement of whatever clothes he was wearing, and his attitude. By the time they crossed the bridge and struck the outskirts of Buzzards Bay, he had enjoyed four drinks of rum and was hoping to be called on for a speech. He was, moreover, convinced he had caught a legitimate tournament bass and was acting in high ethical sincerity.

"We're a little early," said Bill. "The paper said gather at the town hall at two-thirty."

"Just drop your Uncle Veenie and me at that saloon over there with the pretty neon sign," said his wife. "We're going to hoist a few and then go to a cowboy movie."

"I don't know about your best friends, but I don't mind telling you you've hoisted about all you're going to hoist."

"Listen to him. Bill the bluenose. Let me tell you something, Buster"—she leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder—"you'll never get anywhere with that hatchet stuff. It's the wrong psychology. Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder—even Carrie Nation realized it toward the end, and died in delirium tremens."

"Oh, rot, Myra," said Joan. "Keep on like this and they won't let us get near the town hall. They'll lead us out to the ducking stool."

"By the way, baby sister——"

"I'd better go right on down to the town hall," said Captain Cobb. "They probably expect me. Like as not, they'll want to run over my notes, get a line on what I'm going to say, see if it collides with the Governor's address, and all like that."

"What governor?" asked Joan. "And whose notes?"

"My notes, and the Governor of Massachusetts. I saw it in the paper where he was to be the guest of honor."

"I know that faker," said Myra. "He was a friend of Daddy's. He never caught a fish in his life. If you're waiting around for him to bring a fish down here, we might as well go home."

"Now about these notes, Ezra," said Bill. "Have you actually got a speech fixed up, or do you want us to help you, or what?"

Captain Cobb pondered a moment; then he said, "I was calculating to scribble off something whilst we were riding down, but I never got the chance for sipping spirits and chatting."

"Then we'll all pitch in."

Bill found out the location of the library from a youth leaning against a barber pole, and they turned around and started toward the green, shaded, residential part of town. The Bensons came riding by. Bill hailed them.

"We thought we'd come see the fun," said Benson, "and drop in on the clambake and fish fry."

"You'd better follow along. We're going up to the library to write a speech for Captain Cobb."

Climbing the library steps, Bill asked Myra, "What's that you have rolled up in your coat?"

"She thought it best to bring the rum," said Uncle Veenie. "I favored leaving it in the car myself. We can sit out here on the lawn, ma'am."

"This is my Uncle Veenie, a local Buddhist priest, also running for Governor of Massachusetts," said Myra to Marjorie Benson.

"Well, you are celebrating, Myra. It wasn't you that caught the fish, was it?"

"Fish, fish, fish. My lord, I'm sick of fish. Let's do something else

for a while."

"We'll go write the speech," said Bill.

It was cool inside, and dark, and nobody there but an elderly woman wearing glasses and reading a magazine condensation of the latest Kinsey report. Seeing them come in, she marked her place with a hatpin and stuffed the magazine under the counter. Bill explained that they wanted to prepare a few remarks for a man who had caught a big fish and won a station wagon, and asked if they had a striped bass department.

But Benson drew him aside and said he thought the speech ought to be more general, that people were tired of the formal acceptance drivel, and that this was a priceless chance for the Captain to make a real name for himself.

Captain Cobb agreed. "What I'd like to deliver is one of those speeches they collect up and put in books afterward. Along that line."

Benson brightened up immediately. Both he and Bill greeted the idea with enthusiasm. They retired to a musty corner of the room and began pulling volumes with businesslike selectivity. Meanwhile, Myra and Joan and Uncle Veenie and Marjorie seated themselves at a long table beneath a window.

"This is nice," said Myra. "One gets so damned fed up with the cozy bar atmosphere. It's always Tim's, or Bleek's, or good old Toots's—whoever he is, he's One Sweet Guy. All that awful chummy-serious talk, as if they were operating some kind of settlement house." She turned to Uncle Veenie. "You were dead right all along. 'Get a bottle,' he said"—this to Marjorie—"and go into a library. Improve yourself. Do a little something each day." Pouring out a generous cupful of rum, she shoved it over to Marjorie, who eyed it with deep suspicion. Uncle Veenie made a feeble attempt to disclaim credit for the outing, then settled back in resignation.

"Here's a fellow wrote some dandies," said Benson across the room. "Man named Stoddard—Stoddard's Lectures, they call it. They had a pretty neat gift for titles in those days."

"Too dry. Besides, I doubt if he'll live. We've got plenty of time, let's find a winner."

"It doesn't matter to me," said Captain Cobb, "as long as it isn't brief and has a few jawbreakers in it. What I'm looking for's class. I haven't heard a good speech in years."

"By George, here's one about fish!" cried Benson.

"Not general enough. They'd walk out on him. You don't think the Governor will talk about fish, do you? No, what we're after's something political. That or religious, or some statistics about babies."

Droning along absently, and not very coherently, Myra rapped on the table with a quarter. When the elderly librarian appeared, bristling, she said without looking up, "I wonder if you'd bring a few crackers, or cottage cheese, possibly deviled eggs. Whatever you've got around. And a bowl of chop suey for Uncle."

"Honestly, Myra!" said Marjorie Benson.

"You can't drink in here," said the librarian, "and if you create a disturbance, I must ask you to leave."

"Macaulay, Billy Sunday, Emerson, Churchill, Petroleum V. Nasby, Burton Holmes, Frank James——"

"Keep them coming," said Bill.

Later, when they left and went to the town hall, everybody had a good time. Uncle Veenie was solicitous of Myra, for whose relaxed state he seemed to take responsibility. Walking around, she felt better, and she even began to enjoy the amiable confusion. The hall was decorated with banners and trophies and mounted fish and other mementos of the sport. Fishermen were in from all over the Cape, and from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. Mainland natives were barred, by a sort of tacit ostracism. The general attitude was, in effect, "Let them find their own damn fish." Even among the loosely knit guild of off-mainland anglers, an air of vigilance prevailed. Bill noticed that, in the conversations, nobody could be pinned down to the location of any one catch. It was "up the beach there from the ribs of the *Edith Nute*," or "On the P-town side of Highland Light," or some similarly abstract evasion. Captain Cobb's identity soon got around, and he became the center of several discussions. Bolstered by the rum, he displayed a manner of quiet authority, tinged by what was taken to be a delicious sense of humor,

"What's your opinion of tin squids?" demanded a beefy man still wearing waders from the morning's exertion.

"I don't believe I ever ate one," replied the Captain. "Fresh-water fish?"

"Aha, he's deep, he is," observed a man in the circle, chuckling. "Catch him letting on what he uses?"

Overhearing, Uncle Veenie said to Myra, "Ezra's so blamed ignorant he's building up a reputation for wisdom. It almost always works that way, I've noticed."

It was not extraordinary, in the atmosphere of high excitement, that Captain Cobb should become flushed with the peculiar fever and begin dispensing lore, but he hadn't caught anything except flounders and an occasional bluefish for more than twenty years and his remarks were misunderstood.

"Gaudy tackle? Lines? I'm equally as happy with a hand-line, and as for bait, I've never found anything to beat a little slice of razor fish, taken off near the neck."

"He's been using a throw-line," whispered an onlooker to the ground behind him. "He don't cast any more, he's gone back to heaving and hauling."

The item about razor fish was covertly carried around the assembly, the lure taking final shape as "an atom plug with a razor fish spread over three or four hooks," and was put into effect for some time thereafter. A good many successful bassers, ever ready to believe in anybody else's system, laid away their excellent rods and struggled on the beaches with tarred lines and pyramid weights. Altogether, as Uncle Veenie eventually stated, Captain Cobb set bass fishing back about five years in the Buzzards Bay region. Stripers, which had been fairly plentiful and selling in the markets for fifty cents a pound, shot up to eighty-five and ninety, when you could get them, which was seldom.

At four o'clock they all went down to the beach, where the Association had a program of games. Captain Cobb was the lion of the hour. He acted as judge for the potato race, and fired a gun for the start of the tug of war, powder-burning the local plumber rather painfully. Seeing his confusion, Myra and Uncle Veenie summoned him behind a sand dune and gave him a blistering dose

of rum, after which he insisted on treating the injured plumber, who so far revived as to score a clean beat in the fifty-yard-hop-carrying-an-anchor, an event in which he had never before participated.

The Captain's broken arm was the subject of commiseration. The legend had been established that he had fractured a record along with the bone, in the course of a monster cast. Thus he bore honorable scars, and added a measure of glamor to his already swollen prestige. During the demonstrations of surf casting, he looked on with tolerance, never actually critical even of heaves that ended in backlashes, but it was easy to see from his smile that he could have done far better, possibly, with the immobilized limb. Since he was not quite sure what any of the casters was up to, he omitted the sparkling comments from his floundering stockpile and rested on occasional "Hmmm's" and "Aha's!" Altogether, he had a great day, wearing his honors with simple pride, and if there were those among the happy celebrants who seemed mystified now and then, it was lost in the excitement of the moment.

When dark fell, they had the steamed clams, down on the beach, and then the Association women served fried flatfish at the town hall. The banquet room was arranged in some formality, with a speakers' dais and a long horseshoe of tables facing it. The rear door of the building had been removed to admit the prize station wagon, a gleaming triumph of chrome and imitation wood, which stood in the center of the room and was eyed hungrily. During the clam interval, a barrel of beer had been broken out, and the humor for the fish fry was generally mellow. By misfortune, and as usual, the Governor had found at the last minute that "prior commitments" (in this case a visit to the Narragansett Race Track) prevented his attending, but he had set down a substitute, a sour-faced member of the Highway Commission, who read a lengthy speech prepared for the great man in which it was stated that he favored fish. At no point did it deviate so much as a single cliché from the several thousand predecessors of its genus, and it was briskly applauded.

Bill, sitting next to his wife and the Bensons and across from Uncle Veenie and Joyn, arose and sidled along the wall to the

south end of the speakers' table. He crept down to Captain Cobb and held a whispered conference, making last-second explanations; then he returned to his table. The Captain was listening in genial torpor, unperturbed by his approaching chore. His mind was at peace. He had what was described to him as a first-rate speech, printed out on five sizable cards, easy to read from the palm, and so he was happy and comfortable. Self-consciousness was entirely foreign to him. His life of trivial mischief had placed him beyond the reach of social pressure. That his listeners might have opinions about his work had never occurred to him; if they had, he would have preferred that these opinions be slightly unfavorable, or suspicious. Anything else might have pierced his sang-froid. Captain Cobb was a minor scoundrel, but he was too honest to pose as upright.

The flowery and compliment-ridden words of the First Selectman, introducing him, broke through his trance. Because of the rum, the sun, the unaccustomed exercise, and the really prodigious amount of beer he had drunk at the clambake (it being free), he had actually dozed off in the midst of a rippling encomium by the last year's winner, a man he had never met before today.

"—and it is doubly pleasant," said the First Selectman, "to be able to present a contestant from that great neighboring city of Chat-ham, a native Cape Codder, whose daddy and granddaddy helped pioneer this blessed region into the land of milk and honey that it is today, a man whose exploits and adventures in striped bassing are known far and wide amongst both the native population and amongst the summer visitors that we all welcome as such a vital part of our life here in the warm months, a man whose entry of 57-plus pounds is the envy and yet the delight of every fisherman in this hall tonight, a man who richly deserves this gorgeous automobile that you see before you, the winner and a real champion—CAPTAIN EZRA COBB!"

Arising with a graceful smile, and raising his free hand in a regal gesture to quiet the applause, Captain Cobb looked around briefly. Then he began to read. His excellent voice rang out with confidence. He had an undeniable flair, a touch of greatness in his approach. "Fourscore and seven years ago, Our fathers brought forth

on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition——” The eloquent passages were accorded the full theatrical treatment of a master. Both Bill and Benson were struck by his apparently natural oratorical genius. It would have been hard, as the Boston *Herald* observed next day in a restrained but sarcastic editorial, for the original address to come up to this later high level.

The *Herald* liked the speech and commented that it was “worthy of a Lincoln.” In the opinion of the editorial writer, it was either “splendidly inopportune,” or “deeply symbolic,” with the battle-field representing the sea and the theme of liberation referring to Captain Cobb’s freeing of the bass from the narrow intellectual bounds of its environment. “Seldom has such a noble effort been applied to the ordinarily prosaic pastime of fishing,” the editor said, and he went on to hope that “Surely others of like caliber will be heard in bassing tournaments to come. New vistas are opening up in both oratory and fishing. Anglers, the world of unpolluted literature lies before you. Select with care. Captain Cobb has set a sizzling pace at Buzzards Bay.”

On the whole, the speech was favorably received in town hall. There were muffled bursts of laughter, and a great deal of beery applause at the finish, but nobody denounced the choice as peculiar. As for Captain Cobb himself, he had been too busy establishing a style of delivery to pay much attention to the sense. At one or two points he subconsciously noted that the words sounded familiar, but he put it down to the simple excellence of the composition. A great symphony is usually understood at the first hearing; a work of inferior quality requires repetition before the listener can congratulate himself for spotting it. Stepping down from the dais, he received the plaudits of the crowd and made haste to remove his station wagon to a location of safety. His long career of larceny, added to his experience with the banker, had made him uneasy about possessions.

When the car was trundled out of the building, he got in and turned on the key.

“Maybe one of us had better drive it up, what with your broken arm and all,” said Bill.

"There's nothing to it," replied Captain Cobb. "I've watched it done many's the time while hitching to Florida." He started up the motor, turned out into the street, and got down as far as the end of the block, where he ran into a parked bakery truck. The damage being slight on both sides, Benson took over the new car and followed Bill and the others home. They arrived without further incident.

16. Hot weather settled down on the town toward the middle of August, a succession of sticky, windless days that brought out the bugs and made life miserable in the second stories of the unprotected Cape Cod cottages. People who had spent the summer cursing the strong ocean blasts walked their lawns batting gnats and mosquitoes and praying for a breeze. It was uncommonly still for Chatham. Outside Nauset the sea lay glassy and ominous; twilight marked it with angry red streaks in the wake of the disappearing sun. At Nickerson's Wharf, the fishermen went out reluctantly, free of rough waters and having no trouble but sensing, as fishermen do, storm warnings where none really existed. Perversely, the barometer continued high.

Bill looked at the wind indicator in their living room.

"Absolute zero," he said to his wife, who was sprawled on a settee with a back issue of *Weird Detective*, which she had found on a closet shelf.

"What direction?"

"I said zero. No direction. No velocity, no direction. How the hell could you have direction——" he began peevishly, but she cut him off.

"Oh, forget it. I don't really care what direction. North, south, northeast, southwest by north—what's wind direction to me? I'm not going anywhere. Everybody in this town sits around goggling

at wooden whales and porpoises and swordfish, and old schooners like a bunch of sparrows watching a snake."

"It makes all the difference to people with normal seaside interests."

"It makes no difference at all to me, and I have normal interests. I'm interested in this magazine; fellow known to the police as the Santa Monica strangler has just struck again, throttling a high school girl in a public park and leaving her partially nude body lying beside the teeter-totters. According to coroner's reports, she was alleged to have been criminally assaulted. What do they mean by partially nude?"

"Probably a misprint—what they meant was partially clad."

Joan came in through the kitchen and tossed a tennis racket carelessly at the genuine Duncan Phyfe umbrella holder. It missed, and bounced out of its press.

"Go right ahead," said Myra. "Knock all the strings out. I can promise you that's the last tennis racket you get this year. Tear it up and you can play with the handle."

"Somebody moved that quaint old umbrella pot. First time I've missed this week. My God, it's hot. I smell like an old jockey strap."

Bill turned in his chair. "You know, I'm awfully sick of the smart-aleck coarseness around here. It isn't funny and it isn't in good taste. Is that how they talk up at that rotten school of yours?"

"Only the christers."

"You tell her," said Myra. "Let her be your responsibility. If I had my way, she'd be in Culver."

"If it doesn't violate the code of the switch-blade set at Miss Filbert's, where were you all afternoon?" asked Bill.

"I was down at the Beach Club, playing tennis. That device over there on the floor is what we call a tennis 'racket.' I might just add," she said, "that the venerable Dean Witherspoon, the Harvard emeritus flash, is as crooked as a dog's hind leg. Everybody left, and he and I played singles. He outcalled me. Everything was out of bounds. I've never met a more blatant cheater even up at school. I finally offered to get a linesman and play him fifty cents a game, but he chickened out on it."

"This is fine," said Bill. "You're going to be a social triumph around here. First thing you know, you'll get us thrown out of the Beach Club." • •

"Rest in peace. Don't talk to me about Dean Witherspoon. He wanted to take me home in his station wagon. He took Janie Springer home last week and tried to get her to sit on his lap."

Myra suddenly threw down her magazine with a cry of disgust. "After all the time I spent going through that junk, they wind up with no solution. They never got him. They had a man named Coons in custody, but he proved he was robbing a filling station at that hour, and they let him go. It might be anybody. It could be you," she said, looking at Bill.

"Got some new comic books, Myra?" asked Joan.

"Shut your dreadful little mouth. Go upstairs and take a shower."

"Are we sleeping on pallets tonight?"

"We are."

"Baby sister goes to the salt mines, is that it?"

"Pretty hot up there, Myra," said Bill.

"Would you prefer that I go up and she sleep down here?"

"Now it comes," said Joan.

Myra swung around on the settee and put her feet down on the floor. She appeared to have reached a decision. "I think maybe it's time we had a family talk," she said. "I've been putting it off, in the stupid hope that things weren't quite what they seemed."

Bill got up and said, "Too hot for spats. You can count me out for tonight. If we're to have the periodic bill of complaints, let it start tomorrow noon."

"This one complaint, and then no more."

"Tomorrow."

"Ta-ta, darling," called her sister, going up for the shower.

At bedtime, he went out on the lawn while Myra and Alice made up the pallets on the living-room floor. He stared out across the Bay, feeling somehow uneasy. A single feeble light showed in the ocean, up toward Orleans, a yellow pinpoint in a ghostly ring of humidity. Something was wrong somewhere; then he understood. Minister's Point was far too silent. He missed the dry land sounds of summer, the cicadas, the deep frog noises, the creaking and banging of the

house and its shutters in the usually present wind. And on Nauset the total absence of surf left an unwholesome vacuum, like the lulls before thunder crashes.

Before settling down for the night, he called the Coast Guard.

"What's the weather outlook for tomorrow?"

"I wish to God I knew, buddy," said a sleepy yeoman. "The Skipper don't like it, but there ain't anything he can put his finger on."

"Any hurricane reports anywhere?"

"There's a little one making up off the Bahamas, but it's pointed out to sea."

"Well, they have to start somewhere," said Bill, hoping to strike a cheerful note.

"Knock wood," replied the yeoman.

Bill and Myra took a short, silent bedtime walk on the beach, but turned back when the mosquitoes began to swarm around. They undressed in the dark, and Myra slipped into the bed she had made up for herself, across the room from his. Uttering a strangled cry of fear, she sprang up, stumbled over a footstool, and grabbed at a bridge lamp.

"What's the matter with you? Put something on—you're visible from every direction."

"There in my bed," she gasped. "Something horrible and cold-blooded."

He went over and looked, and pulled a frozen flounder out from between the sheets.

"Courtesy of Joan. A present from the deep freeze."

"All right, it's time. It's past time—I should have done it three years ago." She stepped into her skirt, and seized up the tennis racket.

"Not now. Tomorrow. We'll have it all out tomorrow. I promise you faithfully."

"I promise you faithfully." She began to laugh, and then to cry, and then she stopped abruptly, setting her jaw with a look of determination.

"Never mind the bed," Bill said. "Why don't you come over here and sleep? There's plenty of room."

"I'll get fresh sheets. I like it where I am. It's cleaner."

She lay long awake, listening to his even, disregarding, bovine, shameless, impertinent, and disturbingly nostalgic breathing.

Late in the night Bill was wakened by a dull and rhythmic pounding, a series of jarring concussions from somewhere behind the house. He got up quickly, his heart racing, and went out to investigate. The kitchen door was slamming; the weather had undergone a sudden violent change. Smelling the wind that was beginning to roar in over Nauset, he sensed that this would be no ordinary storm. He fastened the door and went back in, shivering from the hints of cold and far-off currents now carried in on the finally moving air.

When the first light came, he tiptoed carefully to the barometer, but Myra called from her pallet, "Never mind—I'm awake." The needle, from its high point around 31, had dipped below 29, and on the wind indicator the gusts were reaching into the forties—a force 8 wind. The seaward windows were coated over with salt spray blown from the ocean, more than a mile distant.

"It's ten days till September," he said, "but this has all the earmarks of hurricane coming."

He called the Coast Guard again and this time had to wait several minutes, hearing the phone ring over and over in its listless, impersonal way.

"Can you tell me what flags are up?"

"Small-craft warnings went up at 2 A.M., and the Skipper ordered them down at four-thirty. Southeast storm warnings now flying, 0600 hours."

"Southeast?"

"That's what I said, mister. You figure it out."

"Did the fishing fleet go out at midnight?"

"All fishing boats secured behind Tern Island on bow anchors and moorings," said the yeoman. "Excuse me a minute, sir."

Bill said thanks and put the phone down. He tried to push the front door open against the wind, but gave it up and went out the back. The weedy patch beyond the grass line was blown flat, looking unusually tidy, and the pale underleaves of the silver poplars were showing like flags of surrender. The stinging air was laden

with both salt and sand—it came in quick, smashing bursts, forcing him back several paces each time. Visibility was limited to a few hundred yards, and the only sign of sunrise was a faint coppery glow, sickly and unnatural, off toward the north. Very dimly he could see both of his boats; they were plunging and tugging in the developing chop but were riding normally for the moment. Both were made fast with 16-thread line and 50-pound mushrooms—they seemed safe unless the ocean broke through Nauset. Nevertheless he groped his way down the wooden stairs to the beach and hauled up his dinghy. The tide was out. He pulled the boat past the high-course tide mark, halfway up the bank, and planted its anchor in the loamy sand above.

Down the beach the Harrisons were trying to let out anchor line on the sailboat. Harrison was out shouting instructions to his daughter Carol, who had waded out to her armpits but was unable to grasp the thrashing stern and hoist herself up. It was going anyway, Bill thought. All summer he had tried to get them to put down a mooring, but they were used to the quiet waters of Ryders' Cove and thought it unnecessary. The boat would pick up its anchor and drift; bon voyage.

"She'll get knocked down," he yelled to Harrison, who nodded glumly and motioned Carol in.

"When the tide turns, it may go into Crow's Pond. We'll watch."

"Some storm," said Harrison.

On the wind indicator, when Bill returned to the house, the gusts were fifty, and just before breakfast the electric power cut out.

"Hooray for Buzzards Bay," said Joan. "Every time somebody sneezes down there, off go the lights."

Instead of brightening, the day had grown darker; a grayish-black haze overlhung everything, shot through only by the odd glints of copper that seemed to accentuate the gloom rather than soften it. As yet no rain had fallen. Alice came into the dining room and lit candles, wearing an expression of funereal martyrdom. "You can't say I didn't warn you," she observed while bringing in the grapefruit. "It's a pity my advice wasn't sought."

"What about, Allie?" asked Joan. "Some of the brotherhood

predict the storm down at the barn? Don't tell me you're getting weather reports direct from heaven."

"Those that scoff and blaspheme will be left on the strand. Mark what happened to the brother of Noah."

"Before my time. See here, Myra," she went on as they came in to eat, "Allie and her bunch have an Ark going down behind the barn and they won't let me aboard. What do you think I ought to do?"

"You might look around for an unattached male cobra."

Alice came back to report that the draft wasn't working; wind was forcing it back into the room. Like most Cape kitchens, theirs had a combination gas and kerosene stove, providing a cozy spot of steady warmth on nippy mornings and presenting safeguards against the frequent power failures.

"Turn off the oil and use the gas," Bill told her. After breakfast, he and Walter fought their way down to the garage and tried to fit the plastic cover over the sedan (the garage held only one car and the convertible's was the newer paint), but after getting it nearly on twice, it blew flapping away and disappeared over the fence and the pitch pines beyond.

"Probably lit in the swamp," Bill yelled. "Forget it."

As they ran back to the house, he saw through the flying sand and spray that the Harrison sailboat was moving toward Crow's Pond, heeled over and lifting its anchor after each big dip of the prow. He could barely make it out in the overcast, which was thickening fast. Above the roaring of wind and surf he now heard the Pollock Rip Lightship hooting, a hoarse and beseeching note, in contrapuntal union with the storm. He had only got inside and pushed the door shut when the phone rang. It was Benson.

"Have you had the radio on?"

Bill replied that the power was off.

"Here, too, but we're running the battery set. Reason I called was, I've just moved my boat around to the Mill Pond—it's official from Boston—there's a hurricane coming."

"Are they sure we'll get it?"

"Smack on the nose. Coast Guard's taken down the storm warnings and put hurricane flags up. Hell of a sight. We just went by.

I'd never seen them before. Uncle Veenie's trying to get his boat into Stage Harbor."

"How much time?"

"They say about two o'clock."

"Maybe I'll go help him. If things get tough, come on up and bring your wife. Myra needs moral support. She doesn't get any from me; my vibrations are wrong."

Hanging up, he told Walter and the others to fasten the shutters upstairs and down and pick up everything in the yard. "Lock the garage door and the front door here, too. I'll be back before noon."

"I'll come along," said Joan.

"You'll stay and do exactly what you're told."

He started up the sedan and crept down the driveway and out into the lane, running with his lights on. No other cars were anywhere to be seen. A boy on a bicycle passed once, going fast, his face white and scared. Reaching the high Shore Road, Bill looked down over the town, a confused gray and white huddle on the edge of a noisy ocean. From the flagpoles of several estates, flags left up too late streamed out in stiff horizontal strips, whipping apart, and a number of fragile birches already were bowed over with peeled-back foliage; like umbrellas turned inside out.

In the town the people were hurrying to batten down. He could see them running across their lawns, taking in porch furniture, fastening doors, even boarding up windows on the ocean side. Hurricanes make up in the Caribbean and travel threateningly north along the coast; then they usually swing out to spend their fury in the harmless wastes of the Atlantic. But they are filled with caprice. Turning suddenly, one is apt to sweep over Hatteras or, less frequently, Cape Cod, which is thrust far out into the sea like a scythe, and so catches whatever weather is passing.

Bill switched on his radio as he rolled down Andrew Harding's Lane and heard that Nantucket was being hit by ninety-mile-an-hour winds. Two fishing boats were reported missing, and several dozen smaller craft were smashed up on the beaches. When he tried to get details on another station, an urgent short-wave message, apparently from a larger ship in an outside lane, broke through two or three times, in what seemed an effort to talk to the Coast

Guard on either Nantucket Island or Martha's Vineyard? All attempts at radio formality had been dropped. "Come in, Ed—come in," he heard a high-pitched voice say. "Our sighting was at 0945—nothing since——" and then a crackle of interference, and silence.

At the shack, Uncle Veenie and two others of the beach group, all clad in oilskins, crouched on the lee side. The beach was a gray nightmare of howling wind and debris. Four of his boats were left at anchor, Bill noticed, all riding far out on fifty to seventy-five feet of line. "The Coast Guard just brought in Ezra Cobb," Uncle Veenie yelled with his mouth close to Bill's ear. It was a tragic story, in the fine tradition of the Captain's most spirited disasters. After winning the station wagon, he had decided to buy beach tires with the money he had made in South Orleans selling somebody else's skiff, and operate the car as a fishing buggy. Early on this stormy morning, despite the weather portents, he had sallied down from Orleans to the tip of Nauset with two paying guests who made a few casts for bass. Since the rising wind tended to fling back the lures in their faces (as they had predicated before starting out) they had climbed into the car to return. What was their astonishment, and horror, to find egress barred by a very angry and businesslike ocean trickling across at a low point and connecting up with the Bay. They were marooned on a temporary island. In this crisis, Captain Cobb showed the mettle for which he had long been noted as a man who maintained a high standard of living without doing more than token labor. When one of the guests screamed, "My God, we're cut off—we'll drown like rats!" the Captain threw the entire blame on the Coast Guard. "They should have warned us," he said. "If they don't get us off and quick, I may bring suit. You haven't got a thing on earth to worry about."

He removed his cousin's shirt and tied it on the end of a bass rod and climbed the highest sandy eminence, where he commenced waving with peremptory and imperious gestures. By the merest coincidence, a watch officer scanning the Bay with binoculars picked him up as the haze was closing down and turned in a report of "lunatic loose on Nauset Beach operating some kind of semaphore." At great inconvenience, a whaleboat crew put out from Stage Harbor and took the fugitives off, receiving a pretty

brisk dressing-down from Captain Cobb for their pains. He was conveyed home in a pickup truck. He was described as suffering from mild exposure and his clients from indignation. Of the station wagon, Uncle Veenie took a familiarly philosophic view. "She's a goner," he said, smiling. "I wouldn't bid it in for two dollars as scrap."

Rain was beginning to come in wild sheets that hurled against the shingles as if flung out of buckets. Uncle Veenie, having lugged his pictures and some other belongings up to Good Samuel's cellar, now asked for help in toppling the shack. "If she blows over, she may split asunder," he cried. They set it down gently on the sand, after which he made fast the hundred-pound anchor he used each spring. "We're shipshape, leastways as far as we can get. GREAT MERCIFUL JEHOVAH, WHAT WAS THAT?" A muffled report, as of cannon firing, had been heard above the wind and surf noises. They waited; the booming sounded again, from the direction of Monomoy Point. "Ship in distress!" yelled Uncle Veenie. "Pounding on the Shovelful Shoal or I miss my guess." Scrambling down the beach, he and Bill got in the sedan and started up Andrew Harding's Lane. Before they made the turn into the Shore Road above, a horrid ripping noise slowed them down, and Uncle Veenie pointed up the hill to the right. "There go the shingles off Rob Tuttle's roof. I informed him many and a time he ought to reroof that porch."

The scene at the Coast Guard station on Light Point was a little sobering. Too often, Bill decided, people in the lazy, uneventful summer come to think of the Coast Guard only as boys in dungarees talking to girls across a fence, as sailors painting gear on an immaculate government lawn, as picnic crews cruising by in their pretty launches. To him the Coast Guard had often meant a tiny yellow seaplane wagging its friendly wings to point out some migrant school of stripers. Now all was changed. The deadly purposeful air of the hurrying figures, the pale revolving reflectors, the dry rattle of the blinker in communication with the Pollock Rip ship, and the gunned motors of hurriedly starting trucks seemed to serve notice that the Coast Guard was a living force at grips with death, and that what had gone before was merely in the

nature of waiting.

Uncle Veenie clutched his arm with a sharp exclamation. The ocean was piling through Nauset in a great white wall, just below the bones of the old Edith Nute. "There goes Colonel Morgan," shouted Uncle Veenie, pointing to a figure crossing the street. "He and the Legion set up a beach patrol in times of outright disaster." Despite his years, he sprang nimbly out of the car with a cry of "Hold on and I'll see," and ran bent over through the driving wind and into the station. While Bill peered through the roaring haze, a high line across the road buckled, flapped two or three times, and then snapped off with a crack like a rifle's. Its free end hit the ground and recoiled upward, where it fell over another wire with a bright blue-purple hiss. Hanging there, it continued to burn in lethal splendor, making humming and crackling noises in a sort of public warning of its long pent-up force. Uncle Veenie was back in five minutes with the news.

"Ship's broke in two, five and a half miles off the beach. They had an image on the radar screen, and all of a sudden it split into two images. From the looks, it ought to be a tanker of 10,000 tons or thereabouts. You'd best deliver me at home right away, Billy."

"To do what?"

"I was aiming to get trussed up for weather."

"You're not going back down to the beach?"

"I'd better put a skiff in readiness in case they'll be wanting small boats to cross the Bay. Injured seamen will likely be washing ashore from Monomoy to Orleans. I've seen this kind of thing since I was a knee-britches boy on these beaches."

"See here, Uncle Veenie—you're seventy years old," said Bill. "Why don't you just let the Coast Guard take care of the trouble?"

"The town will be turning out. There goes Ezra Cobb, across the lane. I see he's limping. He'll have his larger dory ashore on Nauset Beach in an hour's time, blow or no blow. He never mentioned it in his lecture, but Ezra brought in seven Portagees single-handed off the old *City of Mondeggo*. Landed them in January surf and saved men, boat, and all."

"I still think you ought to leave it to the Coast Guard."

"Chatham men have always lunched their boats in times of

distress," said Uncle Veenie. "Here we are now. Pull her over, Billy. We'd better look spry—I anticipate a real hullabaloo before this day's over."

The way home was all but blocked at several places, as the flying wind strewed branches and twigs and leaves over the roads everywhere. Two more wires were down, one lying inert across an intersection and the other, like that at the Coast Guard, humming and snapping in fiery dance a few feet off the ground. Bill maneuvered carefully around them, going out over a field at Route 28 and coming back into the road with a loud scrunch of branches against paint. Before he reached his turnoff, he met two other cars. The telephone truck, with a miserable-looking crew in the back, came zipping along the Old Harbor Road, and the fire truck, siren going and all bells clanging, rounded the curve at Rose Cottage on two wheels, having answered an alarm, just before the phones went dead, of an electrical fire in an attic. Through the cluttered overcast, Bill thought he caught sight of the Coast Guard duck going up Cutchinment Lane, later, nearly twenty-four hours later, he learned that this was so—a sloop trying to beat home had overturned in the Bay off the Eastward Ho Club. Its crew—two married couples and two children—were lost in the abnormally ruffled waters.

He burst in through the kitchen door, and found his family in far from comfortable spirits. The house was jumping and quivering with each blast. Alice was in the kitchen before a lighted candle, praying audibly. Walter was whittling something that, perhaps unconsciously, was taking on the shape of a tombstone. Myra, sitting in a rocker with her feet on a tea table, had returned to *Weird Detective*.

The lionhearted Joan had dissolved in tears and now accused Bill of deserting them all in their hour of need. He glanced at Myra with raised eyebrows, but she only shrugged. "Seems the brassy swagger was only skin deep. The child's as yellow as a hyena."

"You're a liar," said Joan. "I'm mad." She looked angrily at Bill and said, "You're supposed to be head of this family—why the hell don't you stay home and do your duty? You shift around like an Okie."

"Well, maybe you do need a hairbrush," he said, his temper cracking for the first time since the storm began.

"The occasion's inopportune for a lovers' quarrel," said Myra. "Besides, I've got another of these sex things going. A curly little red-haired honky-tonker brutally slain and, I gather, rather artistically chewed. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, a bluff wench named O'Banion's the guilty party. One of those intramural mix-ups from the Isle of Lesbos."

"Dry up, Myra. We've got a storm on our hands. How's the house doing?"

"The weather vane blew off, taking with it the unlamented wind indicator. Thank God it's gone—another bore less to worry about."

"What's the merry talk for?" asked Bill. "I don't get it. You were always the one so badly pained by flippancy."

"If you can't lick 'em, jine 'em. It's been my lifelong credo. Words to live by. This I believe, etc. Ad vomitum. I'm president of the club now."

Bill said, "You're all going to have to do by yourselves for a while. I'm taking the boat out—a big ship's broken in two five miles off Nauset. Coast Guard's mobilized, and the town's rallying round to help. Uncle Veenie and Ezra are both on their way across in small boats. The point is, the ocean's broken through in three or four places, and there's no question of getting to the scene from Orleans by car. So they'll be needing boats to take people off the beach. For your part, you can dig in here and make things go."

Myra removed her feet from the tea table. "What boat?"

"Not the big one. We'll have to land on the beach, and I can't fool around with a tender. Not in a hurricane."

"You'll never get an outboard motorboat across that bay, not in a million years. You're crazy."

"He thinks he's Captain Carlsen," said Joan. "Let him go. He wants to go down with his ship while the band plays 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' What about us when you're off acting the sea-faring ass?"

Myra got up with an air of abstraction, crossed the room as if she had mislaid something, and slapped Joan's face so hard the sound brought Alice out of the kitchen.

"Right on target," said Bill.

"By your leave, of course," she replied, "but I've been nursing that for nearly three years."

"Alice," said Bill, "where's that old portable radio you and Walter used to have around here?"

Alice had brightened up and stopped praying at Myra's outburst; she appeared in much better spirits. "It's in the bedroom, Mr. Willis. It isn't much, but at a time like this, count your blessings, I say."

"Any juice left in the battery?"

"I could only raise one station two weeks ago, and that very faint and scratchy."

"Haul it out, and hurry up, I've got to get moving."

When she brought the radio in, he fixed the plug to the battery and started searching the dial. One Boston station came in too dimly to be coherent, and then WOCB at Hyannis boomed out with considerable gusto.

". . . been established by a Coast Guard plane plying the fringe of the storm that both ships are still afloat, bow and stern in each case now separated by more than a mile . . ."

"Both ships!"

Twenty minutes earlier, at the Chatham Coast Guard Station, Radioman Harvey Livingstone noted the exact time, 1115 hours, and sent Yeoman Burt Eldridge running for Commander Griswold.

"Sir, I'm in communication with military transport *Landfall*. She reports a halved tanker on her radar screen and——"

"Reply, 'Wreck noted, cutters *Halyard* and *Rip Tide* cleared Boston breakwater at 1059 hours——'"

"But, sir, the position of *Landfall* sighting is three miles east of broken ship five miles east-southeast of Chatham Light."

"Say it again," said Commander Griswold.

A buzzer on his desk set up an insistent humming, and his office yeoman, Sam Pierce, from Barnstable, came shouting into the radio room.

"Radar reports three objects on the screen, sir. Identified tenta-

tively as two bow sections and one stern."

Griswold tore at his hair with both hands. He snatched up a phone, looked out of the window for a second at the raging seascape, and then, after a moment's hesitation, said, "Prepare both motor-lifeboats for sea. I'll be at the pier in five minutes." To the radioman, he added, "Get the Boston station and dispatch a sea-plane to the second sighting. Tell them the news, and request further check on all maritime shipping in the area."

Bill didn't bother with the dinghy. He waded and swam out to his boat, swallowing a good deal of water on the way, grasped the rail, and drew himself heavily in. He had the canvas on, and he left it on, buttoned over the bow deck and as far back as the wheel. If the motor ran, the boat would shake off water as long as the canvas held, and so avoid swamping. The wind was suffocating; it tore his breath away and made even the simple rite of removing the motor cover painful and arduous, his fingers stiff with tugging at the knots. The blackness of the haze had lifted slightly. Now all was gray—the sea and the beach and the sky fused into a solid wall of bleakness, with no horizon anywhere. Pushed by the sea that was combing over Nauset in three places, the tide tore along savagely. Bill wondered if he could crawl forward, haul the anchor, and scramble back in time to manage the motor and keep off the rocks in front of Taylors'. Crouching wetly in the cockpit, he tried to make up his mind. Then he saw a grotesque apparition approaching through the water from shore. It was Myra, wearing a red satin bathing suit she had bought in Miami and Joan's Army fatigue jacket. She also had on a hat Alice had given her—a straw garden of sprouting bulbs and ferns. In her mouth hung the soggy remnant of a cigarette.

"What's the matter with you?" he cried. "Go back."

"You'll never get off by yourself. Besides, I finished up the detective stuff. They never come right out with anything. They go just so far, and then clam up. I think I'll stick to the comic books; the total effect is nastier, somehow."

"This isn't going to be any party. You'd better turn around."

"Got a light?"

"Spit that thing out, Myra, and get hold of yourself."

"Help me up."

He counted them; the motor required twenty-two pulls. Then it took up a muffled, watery flutter. But it was turning over, and he thought they could beat the tide once they got free of the mooring. Myra made her way up under the canvas, stuck her hand out to unfasten two starboard grommets, and lifted the eye splice off its cleat, pinching part of the skin off two fingers. She let the line slide away and yelled, "We're off."

The boat's nose was whirled around, and they were carried back on the crest of an ocean-like curler that hissed and rumbled and broke over the canvas, knocking Bill off his feet and smashing a cardboard box of fresh-water plugs that went sloshing into a tangle of hooks and leaders in the bilge. He got up and yelled, "You all right? I didn't see that coming at all."

"Let's move," came a cry from under the canvas, and he turned the motor full up. Only two cylinders were firing, but it finally brought them around into the wind, and, slowing down, they began a series of bone-jarring ascents and sudden falls, of frequent dips and burrows into and out of overhanging swells, of occasional leaps from steep crests and out of the water entirely, followed by smacks that should have opened the clinkers but didn't.

Bill, standing at the wheel with the canvas pulled up to his chin, kept wiping off his dory compass but decided at length that the instrument was useless since the weather was coming from due east and a course of inching dead ahead into the storm would eventually see them to Nauset Beach and quieter water. Twice before getting there they heard the far-off booming of distress signals, and once he imagined he could see a bluish light high in the sky toward Monomoy.

When at last the boat's pounding had ceased, and the waves no longer crashed over the bow, Myra came up out of the canvas. They tried to peer through the flying overcast and fix their position. The weedy edge of Nauset took dim shape, and then the outline of the old Coast Guard station; they were across. Beating down the shore, they passed several boats riding high and empty, going adrift—a small sailboat, two skiffs, an outboard with its motor locked on,

its screw still tilted in the air. The water was filled with reddish weed and jellyfish, and the sandy gale off Nauset stung like a plague of midges. At the low, duneless stretches where the ocean was foaming through in regular white rows, Bill swung out toward the center of the Bay again, avoiding the ugly swirls. Coming in the last time, Myra yelled warning of a black shape ahead. They swung clear. The wreck of the old *Caleb Paine*, hung up for twelve years near the Morris Island cut-through, was coming down the Bay, ghostly and still. Her deckhouse and scuppers stood out of water, and her skeleton bow rocked evenly in and out of the swell. She looked somehow alive, deep loaded, going home on the fair wind and tide. Myra shuddered. "Let's move on."

Chatham-to-the-rescue, in the form of nearly two dozen small boats from the beach near Chatham Light, from Stage Harbor, and from the Mill Pond and Oyster Pond, lay rocking in the lee of the high Nauset dunes where Gould's ferry landed. "We'll leave her on both anchors and all line out and push across the strip and see what's doing. Keep your head down when we hit the beach," said Bill.

The Coast Guard's first motor-lifeboat left Stage Harbor at two minutes before noon, Chief Boatswain's Mate Herbert Freeman in command and lashed to the wheel. These were open boats, only partially decked over, believed unsinkable, constructed in such fashion that they would right themselves if overturned; nevertheless, they were open boats with crews exposed to the weather. At 1218 hours, Freeman radioed back that they had passed the bell buoy and were over the worst of the bars. He received replies from both the station and the Pollock Rip Lightship, which had further word on the wrecks. From Boston had come news that the tankers were sister ships, of 520 feet length and 10,000 tons burden. Built during the war, they had welded seams rather than rivets, but of five hundred turned out, only seven had ever opened up.

The *San Remo*, bound for Portland with full tanks, had encountered the storm east of Nantucket some two hours before hurricane warnings were flashed. After reporting forty-foot seas, together with a sighting of a stove-in dory from a New Bedford

fisherman, her Captain had ordered half speed, thinking to ride out what was described in these parts as a "tempest," or severe squall of short duration. Shortly before dawn, as the barometer dropped to 27.5 and a force of 12 wind registered on the Beaufort scale, a gigantic comb smashed his radio shack and swept the operator against a ventilator, killing him instantly. The bridge, while damaged, was still usable, but the ship was out of communication. At eight o'clock, still under power but proceeding by dead reckoning and drifting fast toward Cape Cod, the *San Remo* began bleeding oil; several of her seams had opened. The split took place forty minutes later. A ripping sound that rose above the shrieking of the wind froze everyone from the forward watch to the black gang. Then, with a terrible shudder and wrench, the bow pulled apart from the stern just abaft the bridge deck, spilling oil, ship entrails, and five seamen into the sea-gap. Their fate was decided seconds later when the bow washed back to telescope with the stern momentarily. In a piece of exceptional seamanship, Captain Storkerson rang for all engines full reverse, and the stern, in which the heart of the stricken vessel yet beat, backed out of harm's way. Bow and stern slowly separated. Aboard the former were eight crewmen huddled on the forward catwalk, where they had climbed by means of a guide rope made from signal flags and halyards after the steel ladders broke off. Captain Storkerson, four officers, and nineteen men rode in comparative safety in the stern section, whose fore-and-aft list guarded her bowels from all but the worst waves. The Captain, at this stage, had hopes of saving much of the oil that remained sealed in the stern tanks.

The experience of the *Fort Louisburg*, five miles off Chatham Light en route to Boston, was astonishingly similar. When the separation occurred, she was considerably west of course, blown much too near the Chatham Bars for comfort. Like the *San Remo*, she had been taking heavy seas aboard for several hours and had suffered the loss of radio communication. The break itself left ten men on the bow section and thirty-three on the stern. Those on the bow (including her master, Captain Miguel T. Azevado, out of Lourenço Marques by way of Provincetown, Massachusetts) never had a chance from the moment of division. Captain Azevado,

a sailor adventurer somewhat in the Portuguese tradition of da Gama and Henry the Navigator, had gone forward to lend moral support to a crew that already had lost one man overboard. After the split, which left the bow steeply tilted and low in the water, he was the first to go. An affected crewman who testified at the hearing later said that he and several of his fellows had seen the Captain swept by within an oar's length of the stern ports.

QUESTION (by the attorney for the Maritime Commission): You say that you saw Captain Azevado clearly in the water?

ANSWER (by A.B. Seaman Henry Dykes): Yes, sir.

Q. You said a moment ago that the Captain seemed to be smiling. Is that correct?

A. Yes, sir, he smiled, and just as he passed, he gave everybody a cheerful wave. He always did that ashore when he saw any of the ship's company, officers or men.

Q. What was the reaction of those of you on the stern?

A. (pause) . . . I guess we were stunned, horrified, you might say.

Q. Would you say that Captain Azevado was a good and efficient Captain?

A. (silence)

Q. Let the record read that Mr. Dykes' reply was affirmative.

17 Coast Guard Chief Boatswain's Mate Herbert Freeman, passing the Pollock Rip Lightship, asked for a bearing on the nearest broken section, and was given a course of 153 to the Fort Louisburg's stern. "The waves were mountainous, forty to fifty feet high," Bill heard him say later at the hearing. "We took a pounding. Several times the bow climbed up to the point where I thought we were going over backward, bow to stern. The windshield was swept off crossing the bar, and our radio went out shortly after."

Engineman 2nd Class Edward Stearns, manning the searchlight, picked up a wallowing black shape at 0118. It proved to be the stern section, still riding fairly high in the water. Almost simultaneously with the sighting, the lifeboat crew heard a shrill whistling, borne down on the ninety-mile wind (it developed afterward that the twenty-six men on the stern had set up a whistle watch, the engine crew still being able to maintain some power). "We blew that whistle for twelve hours," testified George Shumway, of New Bedford, "but I guess nobody ever heard." This witness also told a curious tale of listening for news of their plight on an ordinary radio receiver, the only kind they had at hand: "There was an auxiliary transmitter on the bow, and we hoped they would get it working. Then, between those reports and ones from shore stations, we thought we could find out how we were doing—if anybody was putting to sea to help us, and so on." The twenty-six men maintained excellent discipline. They checked continually on the water in the boilers, wondering when the blowup might come. "Toward the end it was rising pretty fast in the double bottom," he said. "Another ten minutes would have seen an entirely different story."

Chief Boatswain's Mate Freeman, hailing the wreck, asked that a Jacob's ladder be put over the lee side. Then he got a report on the number of survivors aboard. "I will circle you and take off a man on each trip," he shouted. "Watch for the upswing on a swell and then make your jump. Do not jump until you hear my word Go." To complete these passes, Freeman was obliged to present his craft broadside to the weather. The first time around (a practice run) the boat rolled over on its port scuppers, and Seaman Bruno Hrabsek, of Marblehead, was pulled back in from the ocean as he slipped by the stern. A moment later the starboard gunwales were smashed when the boat ground against the *Fort Louisburg's* plates on a cross-running curler.

Freeman was presumably undaunted by these mishaps, for he started his rescue runs immediately after, altering his tactics only insofar as pointing his bow into the storm for a hundred yards from the ship and then coming around suddenly, to lessen his time broadside. "On the first pass, I saw a wet-looking boy hanging

onto the ladder," said one of lifeboat crew at the hearing. "His eyes were staring and his mouth was moving—either his teeth were chattering or he was praying."

"Go!" yelled Freeman as the boat heaved upwards. The opinion was subsequently expressed by a well-known doctor in a medical column that it is difficult for American boys of high school and college age to make an unco-ordinated move even in a crisis: "The years of loose-limbed sports, throwing and catching balls, driving cars, all the activity that builds muscle control and judgment of speed and distance—these establish unconscious preparations for just such an emergency."

Whatever the doctor's theory, the tense youth on the Jacob's ladder swung himself out with beautiful timing at the signal, hung suspended for a second, and then dropped limply into the lifeboat. Freeman gave it full power, and they scooted out from under the *Louisburg's* forbidding overhang.

Twenty-five times thereafter Freeman made his uncertain journey around the stricken ship, in the worst storm to hit the Cape coast in five years. And then tragedy struck. The last man off—last by his own insistence—a 350-pound giant, a cook, misjudged the roll and fell between the wildly tossing lifeboat and the *Louisburg*. The two vessels came together with a smack, his head was crushed, and he sank before anyone could reach out a hand. Freeman was bitterly sorry, as he said later, but he wasted no time in getting under way. His boat was heavily loaded, deep in the water, far less likely to clear the shallow bar than before. Twice they scraped bottom in the troughs of waves, but a superb job of handling saw them safely at last into the channel and so on to Stage Harbor. Several hundred townsfolk, gathered on shore in defiance of wind and whistling debris, gave a shout of encouragement when the battered lifeboat came up to her mooring. These were people whose seamanship had been renowned for generations, and who normally regarded the Coast Guard with tolerant amusement. The survivors were hustled to the station and provided with coffee, sandwiches, and dry clothing. All were in fair condition. Chief Boatswain's Mate Freeman and his crew also had coffee; then they prepared their boat for a second trip to sea.

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard's second lifeboat crew, Coxwain Earl E. Withers, had put out on a search for the *Louisburg's* bow. Their wheel being smashed while they fought through white water on the bar, Withers steered during the rest of that day entirely by manipulating lines in the stern. He was knocked down so often that, upon being examined later at Hyannis Hospital, he was found to have bruises covering nearly every part of his body. "The boats were self-bailing," he said, "and we figured that as long as we could steer a course we'd continue on mission." The bow, when they located it, was pitched at a 45-degree angle and wallowing low in the sea. At first, Withers saw no signs of life, though he and his crew yelled, sounded their signal horn, played the searchlight, and shot flares repeatedly over the careened catwalks. Six men were however still aboard, clinging to railings of the partly smashed bridge; seven others had jumped or been swept away. Of these, four were wearing lifebelts. Withers now saw an arm waving feebly in the searchlight beam, and he shouted instructions to hang on, that they would shoot over a line. There was no question of taking men off as Freeman had done; the section was listing and pitching too dangerously. Evidently those on the bridge misunderstood, for they began almost immediately leaving their positions and sliding down the tilted deck into the sea. One was struck under by the jagged, dipping plates: he never reappeared above the surface. Another pushed out swimming strongly, led by the ghostly beam, but sank a few yards from the boat. He came up once, and then, going down it seemed for good, was retrieved by Seaman Clark McManus, who leaped overboard, did a species of jackknife in the water, and emerged clasping the swimmer's jacket. (Afterward it developed that these two, McManus and the youth he rescued, were second cousins and had served for a time at the same naval base. Moreover, through an even wilder coincidence, the present survivor had once snatched McManus out from under a crane that had broken loose from its supports. They renewed their somewhat perilous acquaintance during the trip back to Stage Harbor.)

Three more swimmers were picked up; four remained unac-

counted for, although Withers crisscrossed and searched the area for two hours. At last, by radio, he was instructed to return to base. The bow of the *Louisburg* sank only a few minutes after the lifeboat turned its stern to the weather and headed homeward, lifted temporarily out of steorage on every large swell.

The scene at Nauset Beach was one Bill would recall in vivid detail for years afterward. Behind a dune, hidden from the wind, the Coast Guard had set up a radio tent, and was keeping informed of rescue attempts on the *San Remo*, whose divided sections were afloat three miles east of the *Louisburg*. Chatham had organized patrols that functioned with the brisk impassivity of a Navy search. Two crewmen had already washed ashore, one drowned and the other horribly injured from some kind of blow on the head and shoulder. The latter had been rushed across the Bay by the amphibious Coast Guard duck, butting into the waves at full speed and taking on water but making excellent time.

Outside, in the ocean, the tide was such that the drift was to the north, so that flotsam from the wrecks, together with the dead, and injured, was coming ashore all along Nauset from Morris Island to Orleans, an eight-mile stretch of raging gale, sand, and spray. Bill and Myra were assigned to watch one side of a breakthrough two miles up from where they had landed. A Coast Guard warrant gave them an electric lantern and a flare, saying, "Shoot it off if you need quick help—we'll try to get there in the duck."

In the tent, where they stopped for a minute, radio reports from Boston said that the cutters *Halyard* and *Rip Tide* had reached the *San Remo's* bow and found nobody aboard. The military transport *Landfall* also had described the section as dead and unmanned in the water; all three rescue craft had then proceeded to the stern section, on bearings furnished by aircraft. A third cutter, the *Salt Spray*, en route to Newport, having been prevented by the storm from using the Cape Cod Canal, now joined the search. The four vessels converged on the stern at nearly the same time. When signals and hails failed to raise any signs of life, Captain Swenson of the *Rip Tide* (the most maneuverable unit of the group) suggested he try launching a boat. This was agreed to by

the others, and Swenson broke out the gig from its davits. It was smashed almost at the moment of its contact with the water. The only man aboard it, the coxwain, scrambled up the bow fall, and was saved. It was then Swenson's inspiration to release a rubber raft from the weather side of the wreck and let it float down on a line. The two seamen who manned the raft in this successful action were able, after great difficulty, to land aboard the stern, which they reported abandoned.

The Boston announcer, quoting the Coast Guard commandant, added a bulletin to the effect that *Halyard* had just radioed the finding of an overturned longboat from the *San Remo*; it was then feared that most of the hands were lost.

"They got itchy," said a middle-aged chief in the radio tent. "They should have stuck aboard. People are always leaving wrecks before they have to."

Bill motioned to Myra, and they struck out on their mission, keeping their faces down and turned away from the direction of the sea.

Thick darkness was closing down now in midafternoon, but the paleness of the sand and the running white rows of surf provided a sort of moonlit luminosity. They encountered two chairs, wrenched from a wardroom's deck stays; a great mass of bedding; a dead fox terrier; some twisted wood and pipe-ends; several large tins; a smashed gangway; a pair of trousers; a chessboard; an accordion; and, at one place, a huge oil slick that bubbled sluggishly over the surf and groped its slow, sinuous way far up onto the beach. The break-through was two hundred yards wide and three feet deep in the middle. Right after they got there, they saw a man gleaming blackly with oil sprawled in the shallows like some grotesque sea creature of folk legend. Bill splashed out to help, ashamed of a sudden feeling of revulsion, of a disinclination to touch him or even to make his presence known.

"Can you walk?" It sounded inane; to recover his poise, he called to Myra, "Shoot off the flare."

Pulled upright, the man slumped forward again, this time beneath the surface.

"We'll have to carry him. Never mind the flare."

Myra took one of the oily arms and, her hold gradually slipping until she grasped the heel of his hand, joined in dragging him to the lee of a grassy hummock, where they laid him face down on a plank.

"He's out. He needs artificial respiration—we'll have to take off the life jacket."

The first sign of consciousness was a choked coughing that ended in his retching up a quantity of oil and water and clutching both hands full of sand and raising himself to his knees, a dark, shiny mass, stripped of sense and dignity.

Then the Orleans Coast Guard duck, patrolling south, saw their lantern and bounced across the break-through. The driver and his helper took the man aboard, and went directly into the Bay and toward Chatham. When they were gone, Myra leaned against the hummock and was noisily sick.

"I'm not so very good at those sort of things," she said.

"You were fine. It was the oil that made it seem bad."

"He kept reminding me of a chicken. Don't know why, exactly. Same sort of awful feeling I get from a dead wet chicken. I didn't want to touch him."

"I had that, too."

"I thought he might be cold. I don't believe I've ever touched a person that had gone cold. Come to think of it, though, I did go out and take him by the arm."

"You were fine."

"I couldn't have been so very scared."

"You did fine, you and the funny hat."

"Now I go over it, I don't have a bad feeling about it. Some things you do surprise you, that's all."

"Sure."

"I did throw up, though. But that was afterward. During it, I wasn't any more daunted than anybody. Or do you think?"

"As far as I'm concerned, you're the queen of the beach. I told you."

"Never mind, Bill," she said. "It's just for now, on account of the man."

Some people were coming, a patrol party from down the way,

and they took over the break-through, telling Bill and Myra to go back to the Coast Guard tent and get dry clothes and coffee.

It was a long night, filled with false hopes and disappointments. The wind died down slowly. Around ten o'clock a lifeboat was sighted coming into the surf, but after the Perregeaux twins had launched a dory they had hauled across a break-through, the boat was found to be empty. It was off the Fort Louisburg, smashed around the gunwales and trailing its bow line. Spun beam-to in the waves, it tumbled over and over and split apart on the bottom. The Perregeaux dory also was swamped returning to shore; however, staying upright, it was dragged in quickly by a group of teen-age boys from Harwich. At intervals of roughly every half hour, a body washed up somewhere in the sand that rolled on through the darkness toward Orleans. But the patrols performed so smartly that help was provided almost at once in each case. Of the thirty-eight men from both ships who had taken their chances with the sea, only seventeen were drowned altogether.

18 After a storm, the sea has an unusually cheerful look, as if in expiation of past mischief. Its innocent blue gleam on Friday appeared to irritate Captain Cobb when he and Uncle Veenie walked away from the Coast Guard lawn with Bill and Myra and Joan. An overflow crowd of townsfolk and summer people had attended the ceremonies in which Chief Boatswain's Mate Freeman, and others, were decorated for extraordinary valor and seamanship. The Governor of the state had come down, in person, the big news services were officiously represented, and a telegram from the President was read by Commander Griswold, who himself had received notice of a captancy.

"Look at it," said Captain Cobb, referring to the Atlantic. "Butter wouldn't melt in its mouth. For two cents I'd move inland, bag

and baggage, and let the ocean rot."

Uncle Veenie expressed alarm. "That's going to leave us all in a bad hole. There're upward of a dozen men to my knowledge that's planning to recover lost property at your Labor Day auction. I hope you wasn't aiming to leave before then?"

"The auction will go off on schedule," said Captain Cobb sourly.

They walked down Andrew Harding's Lane, looking out over the scene of the disaster. Little had been done to clear away the debris. Broken and washed-up boats were everywhere, and all the beaches were littered, but the grimmest note on the horizon was the high dark stern of the *Louisburg*, stuck on the bars two miles south of the Pollock Rip.

Seeing it, and remembering the oily man, Myra gave a little shudder. Already the ugly sides showed faint red streaks in the black; iron going to rust, as the sea worked its patient way in.

A few boats were setting out, the first time since the storm. Small-craft warnings still flew in front of Chatham Light, but the red pennant rippling in the light breeze seemed incongruous against the brilliance of the day. "A few miles out at sea, I suppose things are still churned up," suggested Bill, looking back at the flag.

"They won't have it flying for no purpose, not if I know the Coast Guard," said Captain Cobb.

Uncle Veenie appeared puzzled again. "Unless I'm mistaken, Ezra, you always represented the Coast Guard as manned by lubbers and swabs. I recollect you blamed them for the loss of your station wagon."

"I was joking," said Captain Cobb. "The car's better off gone; it was a perpetual torment. A man came around and as good as threatened I'd have to subscribe for better than a hundred dollars compulsory insurance. When it comes to the government telling me what I've got to buy, I cash in. They can take the car."

"Why, from what I heard, the chassy's over there yet. Sound, too. The seats are all gone, and the woodwork, together with the engine, which I understand was recovered by some fellers that own a garage in Eastham, but the chassy's in good repair. It wouldn't cost you much in insurance, nuther. Insure the chassy, I say, and get back in business, one way or another."

"I don't want in business," replied Captain Cobb. "I've got a good dory business, and I'm satisfied. It's a job where you can sit down, and the worry's all thrown on my cousin. I fail to see how you could beat it."

They got a group together and righted Uncle Veenie's shack. Beyond a mild soaking, it had not suffered. He unlocked the door and fell to work unwinding snarled flounder lines. The others sat in the sun on his smooth board bench. The peppermint awning, now in late summer, was rent in three or four places; it flapped and eddied stiffly, heavy with salt.

"The entire population of Orleans and Eastham is over there combing," said Captain Cobb. "It's disgusting. They've driven down in everything that'll roll, cars, horses, trucks, hayricks, and wheelbarrows. An honest man wouldn't have a show, not this late in the game."

"I've got the big boat," said Bill. "We might try Morris Island, just for fun. Nobody's down there yet."

"Aside from the wrecks, there's no saying what a storm might dredge up, leastways a storm the dimensions of this one," agreed Uncle Veenie. "If you want my vote, I say let's go, that is, if it wouldn't prove too disgusting to Ezra."

"My dories are out," said Captain Cobb. "I'll ride along for pleasure."

Now, after the storm, all was different, the contour of Nauset subtly altered, the old landmarks gone. While the ocean had receded from its principal break-through, the tip of the beach remained sliced off by a cut that had deepened rather than healed. A cartoon island, with a pair of jaunty dunes, some grass, a sheer bank on the Bay side, and a long sloping shelf to the sea, stood today where Captain Cobb's car rested. At one time Bill had judged the tide by the half-bared ribs of the rotting *Edith Nute*, but smooth sand and green ripples had closed over the scar. For those who live by the sea, he thought, nothing is permanent save change. They live in a motion-picture world of endlessly fading scenes. The Operator, sturdily independent, resisting the brave new attempts at unionization—but he gave the idea up.

"How about sailing out and taking a look at the stern? I'm

bored," said Joan. Since being slapped by Myra, and called down by Bill, she had been subdued. Her manner had undergone revisions, her expression shifted from one of bawdy arrogance to a sort of demure piety. This had persisted for several days, and, at its best, had made everyone slightly nervous. If Alice, for example, had been asked to put it into words, her answer would have been, "She's probably thinking up something." Now her voice seemed to have recovered some of its usual bumptious impudence. The top button of her blouse again swung open, and she had her shorts rolled up slightly farther than they would go. Whatever it was, Bill decided, the phase had ended; Joan was returning to normal.

"What's that you've got in the envelope?" he said.

"I'm writing a poem."

"What about?"

"Shotgun weddings."

"For or against?" asked Myra.

"The work is mostly physical. After a longish prologue, which may have to be cleaned up a bit, I show how these sour little functions reflect a flaw in our society. The business of lovin' roarin' to lovin ought to be resolved; is, too, in other lands. Witness the Camayuras of the Brazilian Matto Grosso. They wear zero clothes, do exactly what comes naturally, and haven't a line in their faces. Divorce is simply a matter of picking up one's pillow and shifting to another sack. I've been reading them up, hence the poem."

"What I want to see in your face is some good old-fashioned lines," said Myra.

"When I get a little farther along, I'll draw up a prospectus and take a few bids from publishers, get an advance, the usual stuff. If there're to be cocktail parties, I'll need a couple of low-neck gowns and a cigarette holder. I may go into this thing on a professional basis. Frankly, I think I've got talent—stuff seems to me far better than most of the junk you run across, including Shakespeare."

"How far have you gone?"

"With the poem? I've just finished Stanza Three, Canto Two. Would you care to hear it read?"

"Emphatically not," said Bill.

Along the channel into the ocean, they pointed out "places where the beach was missing, or had filled in, or had been otherwise disturbed by the blow. Once, seeing brown canvas sprawled over the eelgrass on Morris Island, they recalled that a fisherman from Brockton had been camping there, and it was suggested they anchor and dinghy ashore, but Uncle Veenie said, "I'd refrain from dropping a hook this far out—the bottom's all meadow-bank here and twines about an anchor like fingers over a dollar. Besides, I know that camper—he scuttled for the sheltered side when the storm struck. Likely he's in town by now; he'll be back by and by."

They went on out to the stern, riding big blue rollers all the way, but nobody except Joan wanted to stay. If a ship has life, as they say, this still, silent wreck had a feeling of death. All around it the sea rose and fell, in and out of the mortal hole in her guts, up the rusting plates toward the ghostly row of cabins. She lay careened, propellers submerged and jagged mid-section pointing out of water. Bill moved about it in slow circles, on one trip slipping in under the torn and dripping plates. "Let's get out," said Myra, glancing up apprehensively into the dark jungle of twisted metal. "I don't like it."

Joan said, "Let's land aboard—I want to look in the cabins. We might find something."

Captain Cobb squirmed uneasily. "I don't favor smelling around a ship as bad hurt as this one. It's—it's—irreligious."

For once, Uncle Veenie was inclined to agree. "There's kindly the mournful air of a funeral about it. Speaking wholly for myself, I've seen my fill. For now, that is."

Moving away, Bill decided that their solemnity had come in part from a vague fear that someone, dead or living, might still be aboard. The awful hope of a faint cry from inside that black mass, at once attracted and repelled, as people hearing of a disaster are shocked yet wonder if it will establish a record in its class. He recalled a train wreck, a terrible instant of violence, in which the "death toll," during the first hours, fell three shy of a historic precedent. In the days that followed, his sympathies lay with the hospitalized but his mind clung to the chance of a gaudy statistic.

In the partial lee of a bend they anchored and pulled ashore in the dinghy, making two trips. The tide was out, and the waves, even this far down, creamed onto the sand with a sluggish lack of zest, untroublesome to the smallest boat. When the tide turned four hours later no dinghy could come ashore here; the intruding water would bring a pounding surf.

They scattered out along the cluttered beach, stepping around gummy patches of oil with their inevitable cargoes of dead sea birds. Crates and lumber, cans, rotting fruit and vegetables, clothing, bottles, and scraps of metal were strewn here and there but not as thickly as on Nauset where the drift had set on the night of the storm. Still, as Captain Cobb remarked, the pickings were tolerable; he found, for example, a box of cigars in a watertight humidor almost as soon as they landed. He disappeared inland, toward a low, swampy region into which the sea had poured for a few hours as over a waterfall. Bill and Myra, encountering a narrow stretch of only two hundred yards from sea to Sound, followed a fox trail over the baking hot sand in the direction of Harding's Point. Uncle Veenie, combing slowly, leaning over to choose and reject, moved up the beach behind Joan, who walked ahead and busied herself with her papers. Preoccupied, he had gone more than a mile when a leaf of pastel stationery blew skipping along the sand and brushed against his legs. Reaching over, he picked it up idly. Then, on the point of crumpling it into a ball, he caught sight of writing on the other side, and in particular of the salutation, "Joan my darling." His curiosity finally overpowering his embarrassment, he sat down on a bleached log and read the message through, dwelling briefly on the furtive, nocturnal visits across the hall, on the cross which they both must bear for the moment, on the embraces that made it worth while, on the rewards which must come at the end of their trial, and so in similar vein on down to the signature, "Your ardent slave, B."

Uncle Veenie sat ruminating. His thoughts strayed back over the summer and its problems. It had been, on the whole, a good summer, with unusual rewards for nearly everybody he knew. He reread the note. At last, reaching a decision, he folded it trimly and placed it in an inside pocket of his blue denim jacket. Arising,

he struck out up the beach. Joan had brushed off the blistering surface sand, and had arranged herself on her stomach, the letter to write in her notebook.

"Hello, hello," called Uncle Veenie cheerily. "We're the first here, according to my calculations. I fail to see any signs of previous visits, not since the storm."

"It's a good, lonesome spot. I can really whang it out down here."

"I hope your poem is steaming along on course," said Uncle Veenie politely.

"It grows, it grows. I've just added a sidelight on prenuptial rehearsals among the Masai tribesmen of the African plains country. This thing's going to shake the Church to its foundations. It wouldn't surprise me to be burned in effigy, particularly around Boston."

"This composing of poesy now, it's always perplexed me," said Uncle Veenie. "Do you scratch it right down correct the first time, or do you make a few dry runs and then copy them off, like?"

"Not me. You take the average poet and I suppose he babbles and froths and chews up some wildflowers and gets it on the fifth time around. But I'm a quick study, as we say on the boards. What comes out, goes down—with no fixing. Here, you can see for yourself."

He took the page she handed up and studied it with evident fascination. "It tells the story, all right," he said at length, giving it back. "I hardly misdoubt that eventually you'll be suitably rewarded for your writings. They'll be praising you in all the papers."

"I'm interested in the money. Literary criticism nowadays is mainly a matter of friends writing about friends, or of liberals buttering up lefties. In England this number of mine might once have pulled down a knighthood, but the honors now go to hair-dressers and jockeys. It's the age of the Common Man, you see. Never mind the awards—I'll take the cash and leave the prizes for the fakes and the schemers. I want to be known as only entertaining, and rich."

"You have some muscular notions for one of tender years," observed Uncle Veenie. "If we're to miss the tide, we'd better skip along. The others are likely back already."

Returning home with several trophies piled in the stern and others more bulky cached in high hollows, they moved leisurely along at dead low tide, followed by hopeful gulls. The water was pale green and pellucid, with the fine clean bottom illuminated by a searching overhead sun. It was one of those days when, the conditions of light and water being perfect, a kind of undersea matinee was held for those who cared to look. The presentation was lively and various. A huge black eel flashed over the bottom, raising its sleek, wicked head for an instant of recognition; a sole quivered its chameleon way into magic fusion with the sand; a pair of horse-shoe crabs, startled at the sound of the motor, stopped, swung around, and scrambled into reverse, like armored cars suddenly under attack; the pink and lavender jellyfish drifted by, glutinous and transparent, alive only in the bubbling pulsations of their hearts.

The boat was pointing into the channel, at a stand now of less than twelve feet.

"What's that?" said Myra.

"Cut her off, Billy!" cried Uncle Veenie. He leaped up agilely, snatched the anchor off the floorboards, and flung it out astern, offsetting their forward motion. Leaning far down over the gunwales, they peered into the crystal depths. Slowly it returned to view, as the anchor line tightened in the barely discernible breeze: an edging of heavy bright brass on teak, one corner thrust up from the sand, an ephemeral excavation of the gale, beyond all doubt a cask of size and antiquity.

"It's Good Samuel's chest!" said Captain Cobb. "We're here on his ranges—he was right all the time!"

"Glory be," breathed Uncle Veenie piously. "Five million dollars in gold."

"What do you think, Bill?" asked Myra.

"God help us all."

Each looked and pondered according to his needs. The gleaming corner shone out with hypnotic insolence, the ambiguous end of the rainbow, the good and evil cause of everything that had gone before. Glowing beneath the sunlit water, the brass had, it seemed to Bill, a mocking air, as if offering up a challenge. There was

something essentially solemn in this quick opportunity for irrevocable change.

"What do we do now?"

"We'd best mark it off with a buoy," said Uncle Veenie. "And then hustle in for a rope with a cable core. Billy, do you calculate you could shinny down and fix it to the ring?"

"Twelve feet. I could do it on a guideline, if the tide wasn't running too fast."

"Then let's turn-to and skedaddle.

Uncle Veenie and Captain Cobb took the spare anchor and fastened it to a bright red buoy and, tossing it overboard, watched it settle until it lay propped on its fluke beside the chest. Then they started up the engine and headed for the shack.

"If it's what we think it is," said Bill, as they sliced along, making good time and leaving a foaming wake, "we can kiss goodby to our present form of life. Your worries are over, as far as drudgery's concerned. According to the laws of treasure trove, I think we'll have to forfeit fifty per cent to the government. But that'll still leave us each a fortune. We'll get a good lawyer to straighten it all out, and we'll probably have to make a few trips to Boston before it's over. But once it is, you can sit back and relax. Uncle Veenie, you'll be wanting to get rid of your boats. There's no further sense in your showing up at that clammy old beach every morning at dawn; you'll have some time now to take care of things around the house. Unless your wife wants to spend the next few years traveling, you can replace the burned cruiser with a newer and larger boat, and maybe hire a sailor to look after it."

He broke off to maneuver around a sloop that was all but becalmed, and then asked Captain Cobb, "How much insurance was it they wanted on your station wagon?"

"In excess of a hundred dollars' worth, the major portion of which was to pay off people I'd killed, or so they said."

"You can get a new wagon—the insurance'll be a drop in the bucket. You won't mind it any more than buying cigars."

"I decline to pay it. Rich or poor, I aim to preserve my principles. Somewhere or other, somebody's got to take a stand against this nosy, snooping, bossy government interference. Insurance is

mine. It ain't moral to be told what to buy. I had to work and slave to get that car fitted out, and I don't propose to lade~~r~~ my conscience with any compulsory insurance."

"Oh well," said Bill reassuringly, "you won't need the car in any case. You'll be taking a Pullman back and forth to Florida—no more uncomfortable hitchhiking. No more flounder fishing, either. I always meant to ask you—didn't that get to be a nuisance, sitting there fishing and talking to those old-lady customers of yours?"

"I never looked on it as an outright nuisance," said Captain Cobb. "I construed it as a good deed well done. I was able to tell them things they were glad to hear. Your average elderly woman, she can count on the fingers of one hand the inside stories she knows about murder and thieving and rape and such subjects. They appreciated the chance to learn. They sat and listened, and stored everything up for use afterwards."

"Leastways, they were in a pesky awkward position to get away," observed Uncle Veenie.

Almost as quick as they landed, he skipped into his shack and returned with the cable. "I suggest I go ahead in my boat. Might be the chest will run so heavy we'll have to string it between two boats to get it out of the sand. You follow along behind."

Going back down the bay, though, he seemed in no particular rush, his motor was clearly less than wide open, and, sitting on his biscuit box, he appeared lost in unexcited reflection.

"I've seldom seen a finer day," exclaimed Captain Cobb abruptly. "A child could bring that chest in under conditions like these."

"I don't think we have a thing to worry about," agreed Bill easily.

Farther down, in the narrowed alley of the channel, the tide was nevertheless starting to run. Small white ruffles were visible as the water took up its about-face against the unusually quiet wind.

Joan drummed impatiently on the rail. "Why doesn't he step it up a little?"

"There's no sense in burning out his motor," growled Captain Cobb peevishly. "The money'll keep."

A few minutes later, Myra said, "He's almost there—he ought to be slowing down. What's he doing?"

Captain Cobb slapped a hand on the motor-box. "By George, I believe he's run right over it and cut it adrift. His wife's been trying for five years to get him rigged out with spectacles. Now see what he's gone and done—he's deprived us of our legal and rightful wealth. This ought to be a lesson to him. If I was in his shoes, I'd go down to Hyannis this afternoon and get those spectacles if it was the last——"

"Spectacles!" screamed Joan. "Can you stand there gargling about spectacles when five million dollars is slipping through our hands? Throw the anchor, Bill," she added in a hysterical voice. "We know where it is. We'll dive till we find it. Go ahead!"

"No," said Captain Cobb, staring overboard absently, "you can write that down as hopeless. The water's already started to cloud. The tide's running. She's a goner, unless, that is, conditions are windless and clear at low tide tomorrow. And the sand hasn't covered it up. I don't anticipate any such luck. Today was a day in a million. I don't know when I've seen a finer——"

"You fools!" shrieked Joan. "I don't even believe you wanted the money. What's the matter with you people? Haven't you got anything to say?"

Captain Cobb glanced at his watch. "Which reminds me, Billy, I've contracted with some lady nurses from Narragansett that hope to go floundering. In addition to which they paid a little deposit. I promised to tell them about the storm."

Having spied the floating buoy, Uncle Veenie now turned to pick it up. His expression was, in a way, rueful. He kept shaking his head. He was still bemused when he arrived, just behind them, at the shack. But he was holding up all right; he looked, indeed, like a man with a sunny and uncluttered future.

beach next morning, soon after nine, Uncle Veenie ambled up and sat down on his much-decorated bench. He removed a document from his pocket, displayed it, and entered into a discussion. They chatted for nearly an hour. Then, resolved on procedure, they tidied up their stands and arranged for a brief absence from business. The previous afternoon, Bill had stated his promise to transport Joan and two friends to a picnic at Harding's Beach. They passed in his outboard at ten forty-five, skittering over the wrinkled bay at thirty-five miles an hour. They waved, disappeared around the black-can buoy, and leaned in toward Stage Harbor.

Uncle Veenie looked up the beach at Captain Cobb, was semaphored his understanding. Five minutes later they left in Uncle Veenie's best boat, pushed by his heaviest motor, for Minister's Point.

Myra had arisen as soon as she heard Joan and Bill slam the door. She was in thrall to her habitual early morning depression, a gray cloud of ill-defined doubt and despair. Not being hungry, she descended the path through the tangled beach plums (now beginning to redden) and, removing her sandals, strolled up the weedy tide line, studying the tiny, timid bay creatures—the sea worms, the seedling steamers, the hermit crabs—that retreated behind their sand-shuttered doors. The wind was blowing offshore, and she noticed her visitors only when they were passing the Harrisons' Whistler, very close in.

"Good morning," she called gaily. For some reason that she didn't analyze, she was extremely glad to see them. "Come on up—we'll have breakfast."

Captain Cobb flung out the anchor with the unconsciously precise forecast of the tide that all natives of the area have from birth, and they sloshed up out of the water, lifting their caps.

"Good morning, ma'am," said Uncle Veenie. "Ezra and I thought as how, since we hadn't paid our courtesies during the summer, we'd look in to inquire after your health."

"I'm really ever so pleased. We'll go up and sit in the deck chairs. Allie can do us some ham and eggs."

"Well, no, not meaning to spurn an uncommonly handsome offer, but I swallowed two dozen wheatcakes shortly before five,"

said Uncle Veenie, still carrying his cap. "I couldn't hardly deny that I've had breakfast, together with a beefsteak sandwich, freshener at ten. Additional fodder would likely tend to bind and clog. I'd best wait for my twelve o'clock lunch, thanking you just the same."

"How about you, Captain Cobb?"

"I'm a faint eater. Food doesn't seem to sustain me, not when I can pursue a liquid diet. Strong liquids and tobacco, and a regular four hours of slumber, and I remain as brisk as a stud horse at a county fair."

"Grand. We'll have a drink of something." She waved them into the deck chairs and called for Alice. "We've got a new case of very good sherry, Uncle Veenie."

He shook his head no, but gave a tolerant chuckle. "You go right ahead. I've made it a point never to touch anything of a spirituous nature during a workday, and in particular of a morning. My father and his father before him (my grandfather) they always contended the same. 'Drink if you must,' they said, 'but only when you've earned it—in the cool of the evening and around the festive board.' There wasn't a sot amongst them, nor a prude. They would alter their views to be polite, same as any other man. I've never cared for sherry, myself, intending no offense, but if you was to ask me to put a name to it, in the way of being sociable, I'd call it rum. I'll take a little water glass full of rum, if you've got one handy."

"Rum seems to give me more strength than anything," agreed Captain Cobb.

"Rum all around, then. I was just down there," she said, pointing to the beach, "to see if I couldn't pick up a few clams. All the time I've been at the seashore, I've never gone clamming."

Alice came out with three glasses on a tray and handed them around. Before retiring, she sniffed audibly, but whether it was in disdain of two elderly guests in waders, or of the compelling fragrance of fish heads (from Uncle Veenie's pre-dawn beach raking for lobster bait), or of drinking rum in the morning, Myra was unable to decide.

"Asthma?" inquired Uncle Veenie solicitously. "Some sort of

log-jam in the pipes? My wife's cousin Josh—used to be a constable in Brewster—had a similar misery but he squelched it by breathing the fumes off a few twigs of pitch pine boiled in horse urine. There ain't anything better for phlegm that I've struck," he said with a helpful nod toward Alice.

"Undoubtedly that's what she needs," said Myra. "Buzz off, Allie, and gather up some branches, and keep your eye out for a stray horse, but make us three more drinks first, like a good girl."

"As to clamming," said Captain Cobb. "You wasn't hoping to pick up the clams off the surface of the ground, were you?"

"They go out," replied Myra, "and they take a bucket, and they walk around over the sand, and then they come back with the clams. And eat them. I've seen it done."

"You spot them by their breathing holes. It's necessary to light in pretty frisky with a rake or with the naked fingers, else they'll burrow down and vanish."

"Fancy that."

"If you'd care to go clamming sometime," continued Captain Cobb, "I know a place where the little necks lie as thick as flies on a spaniel. We could drop in about twilight, when everybody's having supper. That's a prime hour for clamming, especially when they're staked out. Begging your pardon for asking, but could you run if pursued?"

"Like a deer."

During this exchange, Uncle Veonie had quietly removed his precious document from his jacket and was holding it in an attitude of expectation. At the pause, he gave a cough in which were mixed, in about equal portions, portentousness and apology. His crowning gesture was to produce his wife's extra pair of spectacles, an antique pince-nez on a black ribbon, and affix them in a general way to his nose. Looking down at the paper, though, he could see only a milky blur, like a lantern slide badly out of focus. But with his usual quick ingenuity, he shortly hit on the trouble: his wife was cursed with faulty vision in just the one eye; the other had 20/20 vision. By closing his left eye, then, he was able to read the paper in magnified detail, and he began his prearranged plan by announcing, "Ezra and I, ma'am, we thought it best to bring

this message up and show it to you."

He had begun to sweat, but he continued doggedly:

"Taking into account that what one writes ain't exactly another's business, and yet when it appears that trouble might result—has resulted already—why then, you might say, duty is duty."

Tiny beads of moisture stood out not only on his forehead but on that of Captain Cobb, who now took a deep drink of rum and stated, presumably in extenuation:

"Particularly what's found on a beach, where it's first come first served, and no holds barred, nor don't let any warden tell you different, state or federal."

It had been Uncle Veenie's idea to read the letter himself, as a means of reducing shock and confusion, but one glance at the gaudy salutation and his nerve failed him. "Here you are and welcome," he said, thrusting the paper out suddenly. "Some things are better witnessed by principals only, in a manner of speaking, not that I don't stand ready to pitch in and help in case you get stuck. Drat these spectacles," he added, snatching them off and blowing gustily on the lens through which he was unable to see.

As Myra received the letter, her mouth set in a familiar line. She took a deliberate sip of her drink and set the glass carefully down on the lawn before she started. During the reading, her expression did not alter; a deepening of her pallor was the only visible sign of stress. She read it through and then went back and read it again, as Uncle Veenie fumed over the spectacles and Captain Cobb apparently spotted an object of great curiosity on Nauset Beach (since he shaded his eyes with his hands, half arose, peered intently and muttered in a startled way to himself, while darting little embarrassed glances back at his hostess).

She finished and looked around brightly.

"I think I get it, but I can't be sure. I'm afraid to say."

"I picked it up yesterday on the sand," said Uncle Veenie, beaming and mopping his head, "down at Morris Island. Joanie was on up the way—she wrote it. It slipped out of her grasp and came sifting along in the wind. She writes a very pretty script, for one so young, I mean,—note the curlicues on the s's together with the double whacker on the f."

"Bill does that."

"She wrote it, ma'am. Ezra and I, we talked it over careful before we came. No Cape Codder of my acquaintance favors sticking his nose in——"

Myra jumped up. "She wrote them all. Of course she did. Don't move, please." She started to run toward the house, but turned around and kissed them each on the cheek. "Don't move for three minutes. You're my beautiful friends, and I want to come back and help you drink the rum."

Captain Cobb cleared his throat and said, "As to clamming, ma'am, I'd favor taking my smaller dory and dropping down with the tide. You employ a motor and it attracts——"

Watching her run on into the house with her head down, Uncle Veenie interrupted with, "There's something downright saucy about the stern of a youthful girl in a hurry. There's a nervous quality to the hams that kind of puts a man to thinking back. When you boil things down, it's about all there is. That and work, and work hasn't set too awfully well with me since I was a toddling infant."

Captain Cobb took off his dark-colored glasses, one of the few times he had done so all summer. "She's a mighty nice little woman," he stated in a definitive tone. "She hasn't got the heft I would favor if I was to pick and choose, though an inventory wouldn't stand up too disappointing item by item. Speaking off-hand, I can't recall ever being prompted by a brotherly or fatherly interest in any female past nine or ten, but I'm obliged to say, in confidence, that she's a mighty fine little woman."

Bill came back at three o'clock with Joan and a girl named Susan Twyffort, going on seventeen. She was a dark, restless-looking child with fine eyes, in dirty blue pedal-pushers and a halter. "Somebody's been having a party," she observed, pausing to wait for the others at the top of the bank. Myra and her friends had gone inside for lunch at one-thirty, a rather heavy meal of pork chops, greens, mashed potatoes, and doughnuts, this menu having been elicited from Captain Cobb, who departed from his liquid diet but announced that he was unable to stomach fish.

"I can't abide them in any form," he said. "I don't like clams,

either, or lobsters, or anything else that grows around here. I'd as lief check on a teething ring." All through lunch he denounced Chatham with eloquence, using almost precisely the identical terms with which he had described Florida before he left Miami, late in May. Uncle Veenie then suggested that the town would probably be glad to take up a subscription and buy him a railroad ticket out, but the Captain went on to say, "That don't make any difference about that. No subscription will be needed or called for. I'll provide expenses with my auction, all open and aboveboard. Leastways, I don't aim to be beholden to Chatham, no matter how sound their motive."

After lunch, at Myra's suggestion, they got Alice to play the piano, under extreme duress, and sang several sentimental songs, such as "In the Gloaming" and "The Bastard King of England," finally evoking a peevisish telephone call from Mr. Nicholby, across the road, who said he would allow them "exactly three more verses" and then call the police. They went outdoors and sat down again, taking along a full bottle of Benedictine and half a bottle of Cointreau. When Bill and the girls arrived, Uncle Veenie was asleep with his feet in another deck chair, and Captain Cobb was expounding his theories on religion to Myra, who appeared deeply interested, nodding her head and affirming every three or four sentences, "Me too," or, "Exactly."

Theologically, he was what he called a "Counter Puncher," or a person who gave the other fellow every opportunity to invoke the Golden Rule before invoking it himself. "You make out better that way," he explained. "There's a high percentage of church-going folks come down here in the summer, old elderly antiques and such, and it does them a world of good to reform a backslid wreck like me. It ain't cheap, either. I been reformed so often, and persuaded to quit borrowing and run a little tighter business, that I know better than to come around easy. It makes them suspicious. If they miss a garden hose here, or a shirt off the line there, they can see they've got their work cut out and had better buckle down. Mostly they're patient and non-complaining. I removed a quart of medicinal whiskey out from under the back porch of a lady deacon of the First Methodist Church in Newton Center the other day, and she never opened her mouth. She knew who did it, too.

It was a case of the Golden Rule: if things had been switched around, and she'd stole my whiskey, she wouldn't cared for me to squawk, either. You see?"

Captain Cobb said he was a great Bible reader; he'd done more in that way than possibly anybody else on the Cape, especially preachers. He got off on the Moabites and the Midianites and showed how Ruth and Esther, the daughters of Leviticus, had taken radically different roads as a result of early environment. "Ruth was a traveler," he said. "Couldn't sit still, even as a child. She had to leave home—nothing else would do. Well, she fell in with a hard set, and before you knew it she was stepping out nights and drinking the alien corn. She went from bad to worse, and wound up, as we know, cutting off that fellow Samson's hair and pulling down the walls around Jericho. It almost killed her father. He hadn't done anything. If it hadn't been for Esther, the wife of Herod, and her good work amongst the Philistines, he wouldn't been able to bear up under it all. He was a fine old man, Leviticus, sober and levelheaded—nobody had a word to say against him, far as I know."

Seeing Bill and Joan, and in response to Miss Twyffort's observation, Myra cried, "I'm so glad you could come. We're having a little lawn fete in honor of the well-known poetess and correspondent. Find seats anywhere—the ground will do."

"Dear Myra," said Bill.

She waved benignly. "Things are different," she said with an enigmatic smile. "How have you been, you lovely old martyr?"

"What's it all about?"

"Arrange yourselves in a small group. We're going to read from the latest Works. You perhaps didn't realize that baby sister, there on your right, was hovering, crouching, on the brink of a literary triumph, did you, Miss Thetford?"

"Twyffort, with a y and two f's."

"Well, she is. Two f's to you, too, by the way. What was the name of that poem you mentioned yesterday? The nasty one, with cantos."

"Called *I Hate Relatives*," said Joan. "Come on, Sue. Let's blow. This is an unwholesome atmosphere for children."

"You can have your choice," said Myra pleasantly, "of sitting

down on your own or being flattened by a croquet mallet."

Captain Cobb made a motion to rise and depart, but she gestured him back and then took the letter and held it up to view. "It ripples and flows. Note the melodious phrasing, the deep thought, the rhythm, the evident passion and sincerity. I wouldn't be at all surprised to see Oxford substitute this number for that raddled old wheeze of Lincoln's on the-bronze tablet. If beauty is truth, and so on, our Joan's got everything. And I quote: 'The enduring pain of these last three years, so near, separated only by the simple distance of an unforgiving termagant' (that's me), 'tortured by a narrow hall whose moral gulf is as vast as the Grand Canyon of the Colorado——'

"I don't much care for 'whose,' speaking of the hall, I mean. Personifying hall throws me off a little. You lose the emotional drift——"

"I enjoyed that about the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. I've never seen it myself, though I had a cousin that used to visit it regular, and heave stones in it," said Captain Cobb.

Bill broke in impatiently. "Would you mind explaining this embarrassing farce? Who wrote that letter, and to whom?"

She went on reading: "'When the moonlight steals in and makes your hair a fiery mist, I'll come tiptoeing to your arms. She sleeps when the moon is up, just as the witches dance.' (Me again.) 'And soon we'll tiptoe together to the life that greed and hate deny us. The thought of your moonlit couch, your sprawling limbs, your swelling——' I'll skip over that, out of deference to our visitors, but, Class, in a technical sense, what do you think of hair and the fiery mist? The figure leaves me cold—I don't see it at all."

"It isn't too bad," said Joan. "I got it from Browning. Why don't you write him a letter?"

"You wrote this interesting message?" inquired Bill.

"For us."

"There're more," said Myra gaily. "Years of them—I have several, all locked up in the family Bible. She left them around so very carelessly. I found them and nursed them to my swelling bosom."

"But why didn't you bring them up and get it over with?"

"A girl has her pride. Maybe I've got more than most, or too much."

"I guess I'm beginning to wake up just a little——"

"Excuse me," said Miss Twyffort. "It's my suppertime."

"Why it's only four o'clock," exclaimed Myra. "What time do you have lunch at your place—nine-thirty?"

"Goodby," said Miss Twyffort.

"I wanted you to hear Joanie's letter," said Myra. "I wanted everybody to hear it. Tomorrow I'll be sorry, but today's unmasking day, and I'm having a glorious time. See those shadows passing the room? Quacks and psychiatrists flying out of the window. Hear the silken, sad uncertain rustling of their wings? That's Pope, Joanie—Edgar Allan Pope, formerly of West Point——"

"Come on, kid," said Bill. "Let's go inside for a while."

"Uncle Veenie and I want to thank you for the rum, ma'am, and for the lunch," said Captain Cobb. "I don't recollect a happier nor a more fruitful occasion. I'm not much of a reader, taken all around—a few trespass notices, a summons now and then, and an occasional threatening letter, and that's about the extent of it, but I was happy to make an exception in this case. I wish you and Billy a very good day."

She threw her arms around him and kissed him on both cheeks, and then woke up Uncle Veenie and caused him to blush like a child. Bill shook hands warmly and made arrangements to go blue-fishing, in the Sound, the next afternoon.

As he and Myra left for the house, he turned back to Joan. "We'll undoubtedly be seeing you later."

Chewing reflectively on a blade of grass, she said, "I don't quite know where I went wrong, though if I had it to do over, I'd change some things. I certainly would."

"I have a few ideas about that," Myra promised. "Now, Bill?"

summer, began with happy augury for Captain Cobb. Early in the morning he engineered a coup that infused him with rich self-confidence for his auction, which was arranged for 2 P.M.

A young honeymoon couple, strolling the beach, were struck with a sudden notion to rent a boat. Detecting the aquatic gleam in their eyes, Captain Cobb proffered his smaller dory, representing it as "all boat, a dry highider that does everything except row itself." The groom ventured feebly that his bride had taken a fancy to a red skiff (belonging to Clarence Carter) that lay just down the beach. Captain Cobb gave a hoarse laugh and said, "You may disbelieve this, but that's the selfsame boat in which General George Washington made his historical crossing of the Delaware River during the Civil War. That boat's totted and gone sumpy—you can stick your foot through the bottom anywheres."

Wavering, the young man then suggested that he was wearing his best suit, that he hadn't really planned to go boating but that he and his bride were only taking an after-breakfast constitutional before returning to their rooms for the day. It was here that Captain Cobb showed his native genius for dory-renting. He escorted the groom to the dressing shack of the Hawes House, a hundred yards up the line, threw open the door, and instructed him to "take your pick." The compartments were filled with clothing left behind by Hawes House guests who had changed into dungarees for boat trips, and it was no trick at all to search out a tweed jacket and new pair of gray flannels of exactly the right size.

"Aren't these pretty good clothes to go boating in?" inquired the groom, but Captain Cobb only replied, "Nothing's too good for the clientele—service of the firm."

Thoroughly cowed, the couple left in the general direction of Nauset Beach, the dory leaking, at this point of the season, in three different places, one oar four inches shorter than the other, no bailing can, a concrete block for an anchor, and with such vague instructions about the tide that they anchored (after a terrible crossing) on a weedy flat and were stranded for three hours during low water.

Captain Cobb pocketed his two dollars and went uptown to get some coffee and inspect his signs. The auction, an annual event,

was a blessing both for him and for the town. It provided the Captain with travel money to Florida, and it enabled the summer residents to recover various articles of property he had borrowed or picked up during the season. His taste in larceny being catholic, the sale was well attended. At one-fifteen, when he showed up on the scene, Uncle Veenie and Bill and Myra had already arrived and were inspecting the piles of gear in front of Eastham's former bench. To guard this treasure, Captain Cobb had hired a boy and equipped him with a rusty flintlock taken from a garage in South Chatham; the incongruous warden slumped on his perch, bored and apathetic. Behind a nearby dune crouched a second boy keeping tabs on the first, a trivial business precaution of the Captain's, known to both guards.

If advertising is, as they say, a frenzied process of making people buy what they don't want, then Captain Cobb's signs were superfluous, since the crowds at his auction would have come without prompting. They had suffered and were in urgent need of his wares. Nevertheless, a certain number of disinterested persons were no doubt attracted by his heralds, and while these seldom bought anything, they lent color to the scene. His largest placard had been set up, wisely, in a corner lot to which the title was in doubt; nobody felt sufficiently authoritative to tear it down. On the other hand, a smaller display that he had impudently established in the drugstore window had been wrenched loose and tossed into the alley only minutes after he left. The purport of all his advertising was to show the disposition of legitimate property. GIGANTIC SALE, the signs went, EFFECTS OF THE LATE HORATIO COBB (Dec'd) ON BEACH, FRONT OF CHATHAM LIGHT—LABOR DAY, 2 P.M.—ANCHORS, MARINE GEAR ALL KINDS, CLOTHING, HOUSEHOLD GOODS, KNICKKNACKS & VALUABLES—ENTIRE ESTATE LIQUIDATED TO PAY LAWYERS—PROGRAM—FREE REFRESHMENTS—CAPTAIN E. COBB (formerly of *Flying Dolphin*), AUCTIONEER. and, slightly removed but not inconspicuous, the line in red paint, "No Heckling."

This last was an addition made after an experience with some teen-age boys three summers before. Obligated to buy back a dory compass that had disappeared from their knockabout, they evened the score by sailing a horseshoe-crab shell and catching the auc-

tioner on the right, or starboard, side of the chin. As for the principal message, it contained only a germ of truth. There had been a Horatio Cobb, a rather exalted connection of Ezra's, but he had died in 1921, encumbered by debt and arthritis. After the creditors had been satisfied, there remained a number of trifling items, among them a waterlogged sloop to which Captain Cobb fell heir. He sold it for thirty dollars the next morning and lost the money at Narragansett in the afternoon. The *Flying Dolphin* mentioned in the blurb was a sail yacht upon which he had gone cook in the late thirties. "Free refreshments" was a hark-back to a wooden bucketful of insipid lemonade he had dispensed the past two seasons, and "Program" recalled a somewhat catastrophic rendition of *The Wreck of the Hesperus* by a near-idiot offspring of his cousin's, the summer preceding.

All was in readiness by a quarter of two. A forbearing audience of about 150 was grouped in front of the abstracted possessions, glad of any entertainment that effaced for a moment the mournful end-of-summer feeling. Any of them could easily have recovered their property by going to the police, but the sums involved were seldom over two or three dollars, and this was considered cheap for the spectacle of Captain Cobb in action. Promptly at two o'clock he mounted a lemon crate and banged a mallet on the end of an elevated oil drum.

"Meeting will come to order," he said. Sartorially, he was in very spruce condition, his pants neatly pressed, his white yachting cap clean and starched, his faded windbreak adorned by the Iron Cross of some helpful but unknown German. Reading from a wrinkled piece of paper (a bill of lading he had taken off a trunk in his cousin's attic), he said, "Horatio Cobb having died and passed on, deceased's legal nephew, Ezra T. Cobb, is authorized to sell and auction off said Horatio Cobb's personal and household effects pursuant to will of deceased on file in Barnstable Courthouse." He slurred over the date and then added, for reasons best known to himself, an authoritative name invented out of the whole cloth: "E. Lester Arbuckle, Recorder."

Having thus established himself on an honest footing, Captain Cobb proceeded, amid a few disbelieving snickers, to announce

that "owing to an unforeseen miswhacker" the refreshments would not materialize. "I had prepared," he said, "or rather, I had commissioned a local caterer to prepare, a generous kettleful of lemonade, together with a round of expensive cakes and goodies, but what was my surprise, after laying it out and turning my attention elsewhere, to note that the small dog of my esteemed colleague Uncle Veenie had just aten up the cakes and was taking a bath in the lemonade. Sic transit gloria, as the poet says. However," he resumed in a louder voice, "the entertainment will go off on schedule, and to that end I take pleasure in introducing Noah Burman, the well-known recording artist and night-club entertainer of East Harwich. He whistles. Do some of those birds, Noah."

A skinny, dejected-looking man with abnormally large ears ascended the crate and, screwing up his mouth, emitted a series of rippling trills and arpeggios, for all the world like a happy mockingbird. He was rather good.

"He's fine," whispered Myra. "I like him much better than the reading last year."

Captain Cobb allowed him to whistle without interruption for three or four minutes; then he broke in briskly: "Also barnyard noises. Let's have that cow overdue for milking, Noah."

Burman gave forth a brilliantly bovine moo, with anguish, and then the Captain announced what appeared to be one of his most popular numbers—"Pig sliding under a fence." The muted squeals at the start, the burrowing down, the temporary hangup on the wire with its explosive squalling, and the satisfied grunts at the emergence on the other side were all portrayed with eloquence, and the crowd expressed its appreciation.

Captain Cobb gave Burman fifty cents and he stepped down after confiding in a voice as dispirited as his production had been lively, "Also available for clubs, smokers, and weddings, special rate for funerals, telephone Harwich 246MK."

The main business of the day moved on apace. The first item disposed of was a large green beach towel belonging to Mrs. Harper, who bid it in for a quarter and returned to her cottage to pack. "I'll keep it out of your way next summer, Ezra," she said before she left. "You'll have a world of fun with that," he called to her re-

treating figure. "Your money refunded in full if it fails to give satisfaction." Spotting a harassed man digging into one of his piles, Captain Cobb called out, "Here thefe, no sifting through the merchandise. Feast your eyes but don't handle." *

"That's my anchor," said the customer. "I wish you'd put it up next. I've got to take my wife's mother down to the train at Hyannis."

Courtly and obliging, Captain Cobb brought the anchor to his oil drum, banged his mallet, and barked out, "Lot 34B, one antique grapple-type mud-hook from effects of late Horatio Cobb. What do I hear?"

"I paid two dollars for that thing secondhand," said the man, "and I won't go over seventy-five cents, so you needn't get any big ideas."

"Seventy-five three times and sold," sang out Captain Cobb. The man took his anchor and went on up the beach, looking warm and annoyed.

It was a glorious scene for an auction. Behind them the blue water flowed, the sand lay pale and glistening. On the heights, atop the bluffs, the prim white cottages crouched beneath the stark vigilance of Chatham Light. In such rich environs of light and color, Captain Cobb's customers, buying secondhand what they once had owned, submitted cheerfully to their swindle. Professor Meecham was pleased to get back his sandals. They had been made to his measure in Barcelona, and cost half a dollar, or slightly less than he paid Captain Cobb for repossession.

"I have here a good whipcord jacket, no busts in it anyplace, size about 14 or thereabouts. What do I hear?"

"Hey, that's mine!" cried the youthful hireling with the flintlock. "My mother told me to hang onto that coat every minute I was down here."

"Oh, all right," said Captain Cobb testily, taking up a pair of oars. "Next lot one pair ash oars for a dinghy. Brand new, hand-grips broke in just right, smooth and no splinters. Start her off with fifty cents?"

"And I blamed it on the kids," remarked Dr. Derby, walking forward and shaking his head. "I thought they'd let 'em go adrift. My

wife said I'd better come down to the auction. It just goes to show you. Fifty cents you get, Ezra Cobb, and not one penny more."

"Gentleman closes the bid at fifty cents," cried Captain Cobb, banging his mallet. "You'll find those oats handy, Doctor. They'll work in nice with your gray dinghy. Next lot——"

So it went.

By three-thirty, most of those persons who had come down for specific articles had bid them in and gone, fairly well satisfied but determined to be less offhand about leaving things lying around next year.

When he arrived at the merchandise of cloudy pedigree, Captain Cobb found the competition more spirited. He had prepared for this contingency. His number two spy, the child behind the dune, approached circuitously and began to take a brisk part in the bidding. He increased the value of three items by a total of seventy cents and seemed likely to prove a good investment, but two fishermen of the town, fortified by last summer's experience, effectively ended his participation as a shill. They let him bid up a porch rocker to three dollars and stuck him with it.

"Go on," said one of them. "It's your chair—go get it.

Covered with confusion, the youth marched up through the tittering audience and said miserably, "I was high man. I guess the chair's mine."

"Cash and carry," yelled one of the fishermen.

"This boy," called Captain Cobb, laying his hand on his employee's head, "this little fellow, a lineal descendant of the late Horatio Cobb, has such tender memories of the deceased that he couldn't bear to see his favorite old hand-carved rocker go to a stranger for peanuts and so bid it in as noted. HOWEVER, I happen to know that this boy is saving up to go to college and can't afford an amount of that tonnage. Who'll help send this staunch little lad off to get an education?"

A murmur of quiet sympathy was heard in two or three groups, and a white-haired woman from New York, up to visit friends over Labor Day, took the chair for ten dollars. She handed the money to the candidate for college, whose name was Baggott and who had never heard of Horatio Cobb (who, in fact, had spent one year in

reform school and was currently employed of nights in a Hyannis bowling alley), and went on back to her car, convinced not only that she had done a noble deed but that she had turned a neat bargain in furniture. Later, by what was described as the greatest coincidence in the history of Captain Cobb's auctions, the chair developed to be the property of her hosts, a family living on Crow's Pond, so that she wound up in substantially the same predicament as his other customers, only worse.

Captain Cobb's technique as an auctioneer is worthy of notice. In its essentials, his style had been borrowed from a radio program he once heard, whose commercial was built around a tobacco sale. In moments of high stress, with ten or fifteen cents hanging in the balance, he would lapse into a shrill gibberish that sounded remarkably like "Wheedle-deedle-deedle-deedle-dee," and then, perhaps, "sold gentleman in the straw boater." His most unfortunate flaw was his habit of acknowledging bids that had never been made, for in this particular he had misjudged his audience. "I did not," was a frequent rejoinder to his happy nod and cry of "Man said eighty," but the fisherman group preferred the simple, "You're a liat." From first to last, he failed to make a single non-existent offer stick.

Bill bid in a boom crutch that he knew belonged to Ross Benson, who had left in late August, and Uncle Veenie got a nice rate on a batch of three lobster pots, lifted from Harwichport. Captain Cobb had run these during most of the summer, which had been the worst commercial failure in the memory of the owner, and had hauled them out bodily when his departure for Florida became imminent. They were in good condition, complete with bricks, and soaked up just right to be docile. As to their buoys, the Captain, in preparing for the auction, had gone over the initials "E.M." with green paint and had substituted "H.C." in bright orange, fooling nobody, since the late Horatio Cobb had never lobstered in his life, and everybody knew it who remembered him.

The crowd had thinned out to where mostly strangers remained, people who had come only for Labor Day, and Captain Cobb got rid of several items he had previously considered risky. Arne Smal-lens, for example, had sworn to "tear old Ezra Cobb's head off if

he sells one more of my trawls," and now, in his absence, the Captain unloaded three. He got an excellent price for a beach umbrella belonging to one of the hotels that had a short-tempered manager, and he rang up the prize bid of the day—eight dollars—for a toilet, intact, that had been removed from a fishing shack on North Beach. The man who bought it, a Y.M.C.A. official who was starting a boys' camp near Orleans, was delighted, even in view of the rather steep price. He described it as "a beauty" and made inquiries as to how many bathrooms the late Horatio had maintained. Disappointed at learning there was only the one, he sat down on his purchase and awaited further bargains, soon afterward getting a set of barbecue tools and a gasoline lantern.

Captain Cobb had now worked up to a point where he had thrown caution to the winds, and he offered "one police-type automobile aerial, guaranteed to bring in Chinese music from Yokohama, if you'd care to listen." The bidding was stimulated by the presence of two hot-rod enthusiasts, one of whom finally took possession for \$2.83. No sooner had he forked over the money than a pair of local constables pranced out from behind a nearby dune. "Aha, Ezra Cobb! We've got you this time," one of them cried. "You went a step too far when you unhooked that aerial."

"As God is my witness," cried the Captain with sincere anguish, "I found that aerial lying in the gutter beside the road."

The vagaries of fate at last had played him a mischievous trick. The aerial alone among the effects of the late Horatio Cobb had been come by honestly. Captain Cobb had indeed picked it up in the street. His indignation on this single account was as intense as if he had managed the whole sale in behalf of the Salvation Army. He spoke of "character assassination" and mentioned "guilt by association," presumably meaning his clients, possibly on the ground that they were receivers of stolen property. His expostulations of innocence, his incredulous outrage at this wanton impugning of a citizen and a pioneer, his terminal threats of reprisal—these and other reactions of violence would have left a strong mark on the crowd had not the rumor spread even among the strangers that the entire proceedings were an outright humbug.

"Is there a lawyer in the house?" inquired the Captain, who then

stated that he intended "to take the case to the Supreme Court if necessary."

When he found no servants of the law immediately eager to rush to his defense, he submitted to arrest, with the announcement that, "The remaining business of this auction will be concluded at the City Jail. Kindly step up at your convenience."

Out of curiosity, most of those who were left followed after the officers and their gesticulating felon. A good many were added to this number en route—boys and amused onlookers—and the crowd went whooping and laughing on into town. The Captain was booked and, principally for a lark, fingerprinted. As he underwent this indignity, he turned to a spectator holding a pencil and asked him to "make a note of that," with an expression strongly suggestive that his constitutional rights had been invaded. Placed in a cell with a sleepy drunk, he produced his list of the items left and continued with the auction. "You've seen the offerings," he said, "so we might as well go ahead and clean them up. Next lot, one practically new swimming supporter by Bike & Co., the well-known elastic designers. Who'll say fifteen cents for a starter?" Both the tunkay and the desk sergeant came back to protest, and ordered the passageway cleared, but his remarks were so spicily menacing that they desisted until the City Attorney should arrive.

On pretext of having carried them up from the beach, Captain Cobb got rid of the drunk's hat for a quarter, and then a tin cup on a chain that wasn't fastened very well, and then the City Attorney came in and broke up the meeting.

"Won't any of you people sign a complaint?" he asked the reluctantly departing buyers, but they were largely overnight guests who, having lost nothing, had merely hoped to pick up something cheap.

A few minutes later, in the chief's office and surrounded by various officials, Captain Cobb requested permission to call his lawyer, "Who is he?" asked the City Attorney.

"Hand me that phone book."

Ruffling the pages, he hit on Herman E. Steinkopf, of West Dennis. "That's the man. He's handled the family estates for five generations. I'll trouble you to pass over that telephone."

"Mr. Steinkopf," said the City Attorney wearily, "is a corporation counsel specializing in railroad litigation, with special reference to marine infringements. Is he the fellow you had in mind? Now see here, Ezra, we're going to send you up to the work farm for a while, to teach you a lesson. You can't go around promiscuously picking up every loose article in town——"

"And some that aren't so loose," said the chief. "Witness our aerial."

"You'll plead guilty, then, and save a lot of useless bother?"

"I—found—that—aerial—in—the—gutter," said Captain Cobb, with insolent articulation, as if addressing a roomful of idiots."

"Can you prove it? Anybody see you?"

"By George, somebody did see me! Rogue Eldredge was going into the back door just then and I held up the aerial and we made a joke about it. Something about the police car parking there——"

"The back door of what?" asked the City Attorney in a different tone.

"Why, Cole's place—that crap game in the shack down on Stage Harbor Road. The aerial was in the lane behind."

The City Attorney made a signal to the Chief of Police, and the officials withdrew to a far corner of the room. Captain Cobb, ever vigilant for the Achilles' heel of the opposition, divined that he had scored a touch. A certain amount of agitation had been made public of late about gambling; the police were held to be lax. Disclosures of fraternization were apt to be embarrassing, he felt, and he called out, "I plead innocent and demand to see a lawyer. I want to subpoena Rogue Eldredge and get this aired in court."

The City Attorney came back and sat down. "You know, Ezra," he said, "we've had nothing but trouble with you all summer long. If it wasn't the business of towing in dead whales, it was walking off with other people's property. The two night constables had driven down to Cole's place that night to make a survey, but your testimony's apt to put them in a bad light, particularly so if I know you. Now when do you propose to go to Florida?"

"I haven't decided," replied Captain Cobb cautiously. "It depends on the outcome of my auction. I may stay on all winter."

The City Attorney turned pale and then asked, "How much

money have you raised?"

"Eighty-two dollars and sixty-five cents, scratch two dollars for expenses. I figured it out during the time I was falsely imprisoned."

"How much do you need?"

"I dislike undertaking a lengthy journey with less than a hundred dollars, net."

"How much stuff have you got left down there? Worth about how much, that is?"

Making a rapid-fire calculation, Captain Cobb said, "Come to, roughly, about \$19.35."

"If you'll sign a paper," said the City Attorney, "swearing that you'll desist from all manner of stealing in the future, and that you'll leave for Florida within thirty-six hours and not come back before the first of June, the town will write you a check for the balance. We'll distribute the goods to the original owners if possible. Now what do you say?"

Captain Cobb indicated a limited agreement, but he insisted on drawing up the contract with strict legality and having it notarized. In the matter of various fine-print clauses, he showed exceptional legal shrewdness, as the City Attorney admitted later: For example, pointing out that Chatham ordinances had no binding action on Florida, he succeeded in making the cessation of theft applicable only in Massachusetts, and he maneuvered a number of other coups equally skillful. The document was finally completed, and he pocketed his check. Then he shook hands all around.

"Goodby, Ezra," said the First Selectman. "Have a nice winter."

"And God help Miami," added the City Attorney, in a sort of wistful footnote.

Walking jauntily up the street, Captain Cobb concluded that he had pulled off his best auction to date, and he only hoped that next year's would be as satisfying. As he told the drug clerk, while selecting and paying cash for five cigars, "When you come right down to it, son, there's nothing that gives a man a sense of real satisfaction like a good hard job well done."

"Will there be anything else?" inquired the drug clerk.

End of summer, the sad time. Labor Day had rolled on under the September sun, and the wooden shutters were going up on houses all along the shore. Souls of holidays dead and gone, what Elysium have you known choicer than a summer village on a Northern ocean? The beaches that dance in August's heat are the sweeter for the briefness of their season. The birds and fish and people that move into the borrowed land go home before its magic weakens. They leave at high noon, at the apogee of their enjoyment, in dread of things to come. It is thus often with birds and fish and people.

Horseshoe crab: Why do you fish go South every September?

Striped bass: To put the children into schools.

"It's a joke," said Bill. "I just made it up as we walked along."

"You didn't!"

On Nauset strip the empty wastes of sand lay lonely as an Arctic tundra; the soaring gulls cried intrusion with special poignancy: "Go back! You have no rights beyond Labor Day."

"It was this time of year," remarked Bill, "that Thoreau tramped along here with his umbrella, oblivious of gull and human, lost in his rustic dream."

"Was it raining?"

"I've always thought him a badly understood little man. I never saw him as the wild-eyed woods creature with burs in his hair, dining on greens and beetles. He was only a writer, hunting for material that suited him."

They had left the house for the boat and drifted slowly down the Bay, blue-black beneath the deep September sky. In a yard or two the mournful winding of a lawnmower marked the final sluggish touch to grass that had long died and then stirred in autumn recrudescence, blooming briefly again, like corpse's hair. And in the

wind one now felt the first faint hint of winter chills to come, a reminder that ice fields were forming in Labrador and Baffinland, that northern gales would soon be tearing at these sands.

"It's primeval, as if no one had ever been here but us."

"The beaches of Lukanon before the sealers came."

The problem of Joan had been solved to everybody's satisfaction except Joan's. After a thorough scrutiny of the available repositories for her energy and genius, she had been enrolled in Major Gertrude Horton's Seminary, a preparatory school for Wacs. Bill had been particularly interested in the fact that the Major, a robust veteran of the Second War to Save Democracy, was known in the trade as "Old Iron Panties," a tribute to her inflexible bent for discipline. She had been decorated, too. During the Campaign for Italy, she had won the Bronze Star for rushing a box of carbons to a general in a position so forward that only an organized retreat by the Italians could have uncovered him. Altogether, Myra reflected, Horton's Seminary was just the ticket for Joan, a little bit of Tennessee woods that would be forever Army, a respectable hobble for the wayward and the fractious. Bill, as her guardian, had signed a "caning waiver," and Myra's chat with the Major had been most reassuring. "She's officer material," stated Major Horton with emphasis. "I've been in this woman's Army long enough to be able to separate the sheep from the goats. Those traits you now find so annoying are suited perfectly to the service. It wouldn't surprise me to see this girl wearing scrambled eggs one day, along with McAfee and Hobby. Put her troubles out of your mind—Horton's assumes full responsibility."

Not long after Labor Day, in the lavender velvet of a Cape Cod dawn, Captain Cobb had departed for Florida, along with the geese and the bluish. He was traveling light, taking only a handbag and his contract. More than any wildfowl, he sensed the coming of the frosts, the icy, searching winds that congealed his blood and turned his thin shins blue. He left by appointment, on a tobacco van. The driver had expansively offered a seat to Providence, and Cobb, in the fine flush of their developing friendship, as they sped past the Yarmouth dunes and the mist-shrouded marshes of Mashpee, had exhibited his triumphant pact with Chat-

ham. At the Rhode Island line, inventing an excuse for a stop, the driver quietly locked his compartment. But there was no need—Captain Cobb didn't steal anything all the way to Miami, barring a periodical from a stand in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. And even here he was defeated by some subtle extension of his new morality. His gesture, almost convulsive, was prompted partly by an urge to keep his hand in, to prevent that rusty police-rousing gaucherie that is the fault of conditioning rather than technique. But what was his dismay, upon returning to his seat, to find himself clutching a giveaway bill of the Christian Scientists. He slumped far down, brooding on the sensitive distinctions of sin.

Before leaving, he had attended a quiet birthday fete for Uncle Veenie, on the beach, in which Bill and Myra had disclosed repairs to Uncle Veenie's pet, the luckless Cairn that had suffered dental losses in a boat launching. As a surprise, they had borrowed the dog for a day and waited on a congenial dentist.

"A gold fang!" exclaimed Uncle Veenie, much affected. "Isn't it pretty, now? See it shine when he turns to bite a flea. It comes right down on the lower grinder, too—he's got traction, which is considerable more than he had before. We'd been obliged to feed him on mush and rum. I don't know when I've had a birthday gift that gave me such satisfaction. Thankee kindly."

Today Uncle Veenie was "wooding up," gathering drift from Morris Island for the winter fires in his big kitchen range. They had seen him chugging out of the cut-through, his boat low in the water, and heading up into the tide. His cheery wave, when they passed him on their way to Nauset, was as natural a part of the scene as the warm sun on the tumbling white surf beyond the channel.

"I had the most awful feeling," said Myra. "Almost as if he wouldn't be here next spring."

"He always looks a little worn down toward the end of summer."

"I had the feeling. It suddenly made me very hollow inside. What does the world do when all the good old men are gone? Will it be happy with the young politickers and the disciples of psychiatry?"

They had landed and walked over to the ocean. The surf was

breaking lazily, the slow curlers crossing the bar in crazy diagonals and hanging up as if reluctant to discharge their green tons. Then a dull smash with its hissing spread of foam, and a chattering back-rush of sand and pebbles.

"Funny thing about the water along this coast," said Bill. "The rhythm of waves is different from anyplace else on earth, so they say. The big fellows come in cycles of threes—three big waves and then a long succession of quiet ones, on an average sort of day. The surfmen have always taken advantage of it in 'lanching' their boats."

A flight of ducks passed high overhead, flying fast, in the direction of Nantucket, and Florida. A little later the winter birds would come down from the Arctic, the auks, murre, guillemots, king eiders, and others. Even an occasional penguin. And following them the seals. By November, their bobbing black heads would be seen offshore, looking for migrated sea birds, fodder for a vacation repast in this northern Florida of their own. Spying a raft of, say, skunk coots lying offshore—for they never come into land the whole winter long, but toss in their damp quarters through storm and boiling ice—your seal will sink beneath the surface, swim easily along, then pull down from beneath some fat hen marked for sacrifice in the ceaseless rite of balancing nature's creatures.

Far out, where the sky began, the horizon was as level as if drawn on a ruler. The sea looked cold, and was cold, numbing the feet when one walked on the hard-packed slopes within reach of the climbing arcs. "We might go over to the Sound and swim," suggested Bill. "I like that warm water—it's the big specific for middle-aged hypochondria."

"Yours or mine?"

"Oh, mine this time. I'm not so keen about leaving."

"Oh, I hadn't any notion of leaving. Not this year. I was talking to the Venerable about the house, and he said sure, he'd rent it for the year. It's got that little sunk-in heating plant in the living room and four splendid fireplaces. And it's really too marvelous about the rent. Do you know what he said? He thought seventy dollars a month. Nearly a thousand in the summer, and then seventy."

"This is pretty droll, all right. What about me and work?"

"You can go down every week or so. Or you can have Grimsby come up with his progress reports. Do you suppose I could look at a progress report someday? I've always wondered what was in them. How about if things are going backwards?"

"What kind of work is that for a person my age? I ask you."

"You're a lovely man, William, but you don't really work so very much. Not any more. Not since you got to be a crackerjack geologist, the boy wizard of the Panhandle—wasn't that what Time said?—and took the little percentages instead of fees. That was smart. Whose idea was that?"

"Grimsby's. But see here, Grimsby can't go out in the field. He's an office man. He couldn't find oil in the Shell refinery."

"Oh, you'll make trips. And wave your magic wand, like Mr. Roberts and his dowsing rod. And then come back smelling of petroleum and read some more of Grimsby's progress reports."

"Times have certainly changed since little sister went off to the wars. What do you do?"

"I work with the hospital group. I heard all about it from Mrs. Uncle Veenie. Also, I join the Little Theatre, or whatever they call it. To be perfectly candid, I've always considered myself a bang-up actress, potentially. For instance, I pretended to like you for a long time when actually I couldn't stand your guts."

"It's your candor that's drawn me to you all along."

In mid-October there arrived the first letter from Joan, a casual triviality free of rancor and even containing, they thought, germs of perverse regard for a routine that others might have considered depressingly olive-drab. She had been made a platoon leader, elevated over the logical head of "Goochy" Withers, former right wing of the hockey team at Bennington, released to the service for smoking marijuana. The food was fair, with perhaps an undue accent on hominy, the inexpensive staple of the region. The regular officers were a stupid lot of self-seeking little crums, unacquainted with the hard life outside the gates and willing to toss subordinates to the dogs in order to ascend the ladder of military promotion. There was too strong a link between honest merit and social connection. It made a poor situation for the husbands, who must drift from post to post entertaining, suffering snubs, and nursing an affability

toward higher-up Waco that meant diffusing their own personalities. Of Major Horton herself, it was remarked that she was comparatively sound as regulars went but was suspected of bucking for lieutenant colonel. The basic problem, not only with her and with Goochy Withers, but throughout the school, was Men. Weaving its way among the limp and familiar complaints was the obsessive hymn to sex of the traditional confined recruit.

"She sounds like a Pfc. at Camp Upton. The next thing you know she'll be slapped in the guardhouse for inflicting parenthood on a Townie. Maybe this wasn't such a good move."

"It's only Army talk, dear," said Myra. "I think she likes it. Somehow or other, I have a strong feeling of preordination about this career. It's just possible that we're launching the first important female military figure since Joan of Arc."

"My God, what a responsibility!"

In November, having written his widow friend in Florida, they had a postcard from Captain Cobb, a pictorial eyesore showing a disconsolate flamingo standing one-legged in a body of violet water and including an underline recommending Gus's Lounge. The Captain's message was heart-warming, a little breath of Chatham summer from the land of fishburger and overflowing citrus. Business was good. He had never known people so keen about theoretical yachting; on a single afternoon he had signed a full crew of twenty-five students onto a two-masted schooner, collecting an advance of two dollars a head. His sole setback since his arrival had been a shortsighted attempt, in connection with another vessel, to enroll a corpulent and simple-looking ass who turned out to be the owner. Captain Cobb hoped they were all well and he had met a young lawyer who thought he could break the contract long before spring. Kindly convey his respects to the police ("Ha-ha!"). Their obedient servant, etc.

Uncle Veenie had finished wooding up and was spending most of his days in his kitchen, whittling out a model ship. He made one each winter, a miniature of perfection with a subtle touch more, a look of grace, or yar, that designers try to get into the parent craft.

On Thanksgiving, making a round of visits, Bill and Myra looked in briefly on Good Samuel, finding him sitting on his ragbag porch,

near the Astors' steps, bundled up in a crazy quilt. He had suffered an illness, his first in eight years, but was now on the mend. The trouble had been spotted by a "Family healer" (unlicensed) who lived deep in the scrub toward Brewster. Samuel, an occasional patient of welfare, had been persuaded to forsake his diet of omnibus chowder and embark on a digestive course of processed wheat chaff, soy, corn husks, and bamboo shoots. He had been supplied, further, with a bottle of pills which were guaranteed to act on him like spinach on Popeye. Eating briskly, he had been bedfast within a week, and out of desperation he had summoned the unauthorized homeopath. The diagnosis came with refreshing speed: "Vitamin poisoning." The following morning, all but dragging himself over the sand, Samuel collected six fish heads, two fluke only beginning to rot, a blue crab, several quahaugs, and a half tin pail of razor clams. Convalescence had since been steady. He welcomed his visitors up the Astors' fancy gangway and they chatted in the pale November sun.

Most of Christmas week they spent "gunning" from a blind they built with Uncle Veenie on Morris Island. The marshes and dunes were a regular preserve of small game—ducks, geese, pheasant, partridge, quail, rabbits, foxes, and deer. Bill still had one of his boats in the water; it was that nice. One day, coming in from an outing, they saw a ten-tined buck swimming down the very center of the channel, headed God knows where, maybe fleeing from dogs. They swerved to let him by, and his brown, soft, slightly panicked eyes followed them without blinking until they had slipped behind the black-can buoy. From morning to night, these days, they seemed never to have an idle moment. Between working and working at playing, their cup was full and running over.

Sometimes when the wind blew hard in the night, they remembered the two terrible days of storm, and the stormy gusts that had blown in their own house before Captain Cobb and Uncle Veenie stepped in to bear a hand. Then, always, they felt that life to be good had to be simple, and they wanted to say to others: Go out of the cities if you wish to be free. That cloud you see is a mirage manufactured by your fellows. Unburden yourselves of the gloomy predictions of strutting little men. Nature's balance will remain

forever unaltered, nor can mortal minds prevail in fitting out the world. We have no lasting dominance over the apes, and the future of the ant is quite as bright as yours. Where are the graves of ten thousand years ago? What giant among them leaves his tomb enshrined for worship? Beware of leaders; a great man is usually an ordinary fool with extraordinary ambition. How do we count the blunders of the omniscient and the mighty? Wisdom is a shifting scene, true knowledge a property of the angels. The Wise Men of Egypt said the sun was a flying hawk. Yesterday's cure is today's anathema to the doctors; no sickness lies over the lands but that was prescribed in solemn council by our leaders. Those ponderous warnings, these pious sermons can be as the sound of a falling tree in an untenanted wood. There is no radio without its button, no newspaper far from a welcoming flame. Do not join, stay uncommitted, resist to the death being governed. Nowhere will you find comfort in an ordered collision of your species. "Happiness," said Myra, groping for the answer, "is an inside job. I used to see through a glass, darkly—that was at the cocktail parties—but now I'm so busy being simple that I make no effort to see, and so have very satisfactory vision."

"I think you've struck it," said Bill. "Maybe life can only be good when you never have time to get bored."

For want of a profound solution, they let it go at that. Doubtless tomorrow will see a better, for tomorrow's sun rises on a stranger world, and nothing is really important except today.

